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BRITISH PRIME MINISTERS  
OF THE  
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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# BRITISH PRIME MINISTERS

## INTRODUCTORY

### § 1. PARLIAMENTARY SOVEREIGNTY

THE office and title of prime minister are modern developments of the British Constitution. They are products of the Cabinet system of government. And the Cabinet system of government is itself the outcome of the division of Parliament into parties. This division of Parliament into parties, again, is the result of that attainment of sovereign power by the Parliament, as opposed to the monarch, which accrued from the Puritan Rebellion and the Glorious Revolution of the seventeenth century. Hence, in order that the position and power of the eighteenth-century prime ministers may be intelligible, it is desirable to dwell for a few moments on each of these constitutional antecedents of the premiership—viz., parliamentary sovereignty, the party system, and the Cabinet.

Respecting the first, suffice it to say that until the middle of the seventeenth century the theory and the practice of the Constitution coincided, and the monarch was the centre and source of sovereignty in the State. It was he who legislated, by the advice of his lords spiritual and temporal, and with the consent of his commons in Parliament assembled. It was he who administered the laws by means of his Privy Council, his great officers of State, and his numerous minor executive agents. It was he who judged the causes of his subjects, whether himself in person or by means of his various justices and courts of law. It was he, too,

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who was feudal lord paramount of all the land of England; the commander-in-chief of its military forces; the owner of its navy; and, since the Reformation, the official head of its Church.

In constitutional theory the might of the monarchy still remains undiminished, and its majesty undimmed. But, as the consequence of many conflicts and conventions, and particularly as the corollary to the great struggles of the seventeenth century, the channels through which the monarch can and shall exercise his prerogatives have been so strictly defined, and so far removed from the monarch's control, that in effect his sovereignty has been transferred from himself to his House of Commons. The civil war between Charles I. and his Parliament, which terminated in the total ruin of the royal cause and the execution of the king, decided once for all that whenever the will of the monarch and the will of the people—or the dominant section of the people—conflict, it shall be the will of the people that shall prevail. In vain did Charles II. and James II.—the one by craft, the other by force—try to reverse this verdict. They merely precipitated the crisis of 1688, and achieved the permanent exclusion of their dynasty from the throne. The Glorious Revolution definitely established parliamentary sovereignty, broke the divine hereditary succession to the Crown, and founded a new monarchy on a statutory basis, which, although it retained the old name and perpetuated the traditional theory of the Constitution, was virtually the hereditary presidency of a republic.

### § 2. THE PARTY SYSTEM

The great seventeenth-century struggles which resulted in the destruction of *jure divino* monarchy in England, and the establishment in its place of a crowned republic wherein sovereignty resides in Parliament—these great struggles engendered the two political parties whose constitutional conflicts consti-

tute so prominent a feature of eighteenth-century history. The Royalists were the spiritual ancestors of the eighteenth-century Tories; the Roundheads were the progenitors of the eighteenth-century Whigs.

It is, of course, possible to trace the genealogy of these parties to a still earlier antiquity. For the two parties—Cavalier and Roundhead, Tory and Whig, Conservative and Liberal, Moderate and Progressive—stand for and represent primitive and permanent tendencies in eternal human nature. In all ages and in all countries where political power has been held, or sought, by either an aristocracy or a democracy there has been, on the one side, the party of order, and, on the other side, the party of progress. The party of order stands with its face towards the past, filled with reverence for ancestors, with affection for old institutions, with devotion to tradition, with respect for law, with submission to custom, with loyalty to established authority in Church and State. On the other hand, the party of progress turns its back upon the past and faces the future with eager anticipation. It tends to doubt ancestral wisdom, to criticise custom, to repudiate tradition, and even to question the sanctity of law. It is disposed to see the defects rather than the excellencies of existing institutions; to be ready for change and willing to run the risk of experiment; to be avid of novelty, assertive of freedom, intolerant of authority.

Looking at history from the point of view of these enduring antinomies of human nature, we can perceive the existence of parties essentially the same as those of the eighteenth century, and of to-day, in every period of our country's history, and, indeed, in every period of the history of the world. For example, Whigs and Tories, under other names, fought for their fundamental principles—the old *versus* the new—in the Reformation struggles of the sixteenth century; in the conflicts which raged round the Provisions of Oxford and Magna Carta during the thirteenth century; in the fierce controversies which separated Henry II. from

Becket, Henry I. from Anselm, and Edwy from Dunstan, in yet earlier ages. In truth, not to labour the point further, it might well be contended that the deep, underlying party division can be traced throughout all recorded history back to the Garden of Eden, where Eve was a progressive, dissatisfied with the present, eager for novelty, willing to run risks, contemptuous of authority and law; while Adam was a moderate, contented and immobile, waiting to be pushed or pulled into innovation.

Logically there are but two parties possible; and if at any time (such as the present) there appear to be more than two, this deceptive appearance is simply due to the fact that issues are confused and minds are muddled. For when issues are disentangled, when the many problems of politics are taken one by one, when complicated questions are analysed into their primary constituent elements, and when, after the last analysis, the ultimate points are put individually, two answers alone are conceivable in each case—either an unqualified Yes, or an unqualified No. However loudly third parties may assert themselves, and however confidently they may boast their permanence, when they reach the House of Commons they are disintegrated, for there are only two lobbies in which they can vote.

If, however, the two parties represent eternal and ineradicable tendencies of human nature, it was not, in England, until the close of the seventeenth century, when sovereignty in the State passed from monarch to Parliament, that they became protagonists on the political stage. Under Charles II. they took shape as a Court party and a Country party. In the fierce struggle over the Exclusion Bill (1679-1681) they organised themselves under the titles "Whig" and "Tory"—both of which titles were originally terms of savage abuse invented by the enemy. The revolution of 1688, although some Tories supported it, ended in a definite triumph for Whig principles. After the revolution, during the reigns of William III. and Anne, the Tories

desperately fought to recover their lost ascendancy. For one brief period just before the death of Anne (1710-1714) they regained control of affairs, and strove with hectic eagerness to establish a permanent dominion. But—partly owing to internal dissensions, partly owing to the suddenness of Queen Anne's demise, partly owing to the superior organisation and energy of the Whigs—the establishment of the Hanoverians upon the throne in 1714 sent them into hopeless and embittered opposition for nearly half a century.

It will be necessary for us in the course of our survey to treat of the principles and policies of the two parties from the year 1714 onward. Suffice it now to note that under Queen Anne the Whigs stood for the constitutional monarchy as established by contract and by Act of Parliament in 1689, for the principle of limited toleration in religion, for an active foreign policy, for the development of commerce, for the interests of the moneyed class. The Tories, on the other hand, clung to the doctrine of the divine hereditary right of kings; to the identification of Church and State, with its corollary, the restriction of the rights of citizenship to members of the Church of England; to the policy of non-intervention in the affairs of the Continent; to the maintenance of the ascendancy of the landed interest; to the preservation of the old rural England that was menaced by the rivalry of the growing towns and by the power of the new class of mercantile magnates.

### § 3. THE CABINET

It will be noted that some of these conflicting party principles at the beginning of the eighteenth century went much more deeply below the surface of politics than did the party differences of, say, the Victorian Age. Questions of dynasty were at issue: Stuart *versus* Hanoverian. Questions of religion were at issue: the existence of nonconformity of all sorts was at stake. Questions of social ascendancy were at issue: should

the old landed gentry or the new moneyed magnates dominate the nation. Questions, indeed, of the whole future course of English polity were at issue: should England remain a small self-sufficient agricultural country, protected from outside interference by an adequate navy, but playing no part in the conflicts of the Continent; or should she, in union with Scotland, develop her overseas trade, establish her great chartered companies, maintain her powerful armies, intervene decisively in European affairs with a view to the preservation of the balance of power in the world. Issues so profound and far-reaching as these gave to the party battles of the post-revolution period (1689-1739) a peculiar intensity and ferocity. Compromise was impossible. Coalitions were impracticable. Mixed Ministries proved to be unworkable. Hence, out of the tumult and the strife emerged the homogeneous Cabinet of modern times.

If we ask what are the characteristics of the Cabinet in its fully developed form, the answer comes that they are six in number. First, the Cabinet is homogeneous—that is to say, it consists of members of one political party—or, in the case of temporary coalitions, such as the War Cabinets of 1852-1855 and 1915-1922, of persons who agree on the questions at issue at the moment. Secondly, it is drawn from the party (or coalition of parties) which has a majority in the House of Commons; it is dependent upon the support of the House of Commons; it is responsible to the House of Commons, the royal appointment and control being merely formal and nominal. Thirdly, it is a corporate unit, standing or falling as an indivisible whole, speaking with a single voice, presenting an unbroken front to the world. Fourthly, it includes, and primarily consists of, all the heads of the great executive departments of State. Fifthly, it actually controls the administration; is, in fact, the Government; exercises, in effect—albeit in the name of the King, on behalf of the Parliament, and in virtue of the suffrages of the

people—the sovereign authority of the State. Finally, it is formed, presided over, guided, and controlled by a person commonly called the “prime minister.”

Long lapse of time was required to evolve all these features of the modern Cabinet in full perfection.

The first homogeneous Ministry on record was that of the so-called Whig “Junto” of 1693-1696; but it was clearly dependent on William III. and not upon Parliament. More near to a Cabinet was the wholly Whig Ministry which waged the War of the Spanish Succession from 1708 to 1710; for it kept its place in spite of the intense antipathy of Anne. But it had no one among its members who could properly be termed prime minister. Throughout the eighteenth century there were frequent examples of mixed Ministries: the Tory Bute was forced by the king into the Whig Cabinet of Newcastle; the advanced Whig Fox accepted office under the reactionary Tory North; and so on. In particular, the office of Lord Chancellor was for long regarded as extra-party. Indeed, not until in 1801, when Addington refused to allow the ex-Lord Chancellor, Loughborough, to attend the meetings of his Ministry, was the principle of homogeneity completely established. Again, as we shall later have occasion to observe, both George II. and George III. vehemently asserted, and vigorously attempted to vindicate the assertion, that Ministers are, in fact as well as in name, the servants of the monarch, appointed by him, responsible to him, liable to dismissal by him. Not until George III. sank into imbecility in 1811 was the last of this medieval anachronism heard. The corporate solidarity of the Cabinet was even longer in impressing itself as an essential characteristic of the new form of the executive: a prime minister so recent as Lord Melbourne (1835-1841) had, on one occasion, to stand with his back against the door of the council chamber, refusing to allow his colleagues to depart until they had reached an agreement. “It does not in the least matter *what we say*,” he told them, “but we

*must* all say the same." Finally, the office and title of prime minister were exceedingly slow to evolve.

#### § 4. THE PRIME MINISTER

The prime minister, although for two hundred years he has, in fact, been the mainspring of the British Government, is, even at the present moment, all but unknown, as such, to either the letter of the law or the theory of the Constitution. The office of prime minister is still an entirely informal one; its holder, as such, receives no salary, exercises no legal authority, incurs no responsibility. In order that he may receive emolument and wield responsible power, he has to be sworn a member of the Privy Council, and has to be invested with some administrative office. Usually the prime minister is made First Lord of the Treasury, a sine-curist whose freedom from departmental duties leaves him free to give all his attention to the general policy of the Government. Occasionally, for special reasons, he takes some other office. For instance, Chatham in 1766 became Lord Privy Seal; while Salisbury in 1885, and again in 1895, took upon himself the onerous duties of the Foreign Office.

So far as I am aware, in only two official documents, both of very recent date, is the title "prime minister" formally recognised and employed. In 1905, when Mr. (now Lord) Balfour was prime minister, owing to the fact that as a commoner he came very far down in the ceremonial order of precedence, a royal proclamation was issued, conferring upon the prime minister, as such, and irrespective of either his personal status or his departmental office, the fifth place in processional dignity—the four superior places being occupied by (1) the Royal Family, (2) the Archbishop of Canterbury, (3) the Lord Chancellor, and (4) the Archbishop of York. The other, and earlier, formal recognition of the title appears in the preamble to the Treaty of Berlin, 1878, where the Earl of Beaconsfield is

described as "First Lord of Her Majesty's Treasury and Prime Minister of England."

In the eighteenth century, important as the office of prime minister became, its existence was carefully concealed, as though it were something unconstitutional and even indecent. The title—*premier ministre*—was looked upon as something un-English and improper, rightly applicable to such irresponsible tyrants as Richelieu and Mazarin, but wholly unsuited to any servant of a British king, or any member of a constitutional Government. Both the Whig Walpole and the Tory North repudiated it with indignation. It was, indeed, throughout the eighteenth century a term of abuse and condemnation. Jonathan Swift was the man who first gave it considerable currency : it was an important item in that well-furnished vocabulary of execration which he hurled at the indifferent head of the great Sir Robert. It was never employed by reputable writers on the Constitution, nor, indeed, did they recognise the office for which the title stood. Montesquieu, for instance, devoted a notable section of his *Esprit des Lois* (1748) to an exposition of what appeared to him to be the outstanding features of the form of government which prevailed in this country under the Hanoverians; but he made no mention of a prime minister, and he portrayed an ideal separation of powers in the British Constitution which was precisely what the rise of the prime minister had ended. Blackstone, again, the eminent English jurist and judge, in his famous *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765), treated at great length of the mode of government in Britain; but he seemed to know nothing of the prime minister or the Cabinet, or the party system, or parliamentary sovereignty. He wrote as though the King still ruled as well as reigned; as though the King still legislated with the aid of his lords and commons; as though the King still administered the law by means of his Privy Council; as though the King still judged the causes of his subjects through the instrumentality of his nomi-

nees. It would be difficult to conceive a picture more remote from reality. Finally, De Lolme, whose treatise on *The Constitution of England* had an enormous vogue in this country for fifty years (1772-1822), gave an elaborate description of the Central Government of Great Britain without so much as mentioning or suggesting the existence of a prime minister.

This blindness to fact is, perhaps, not very remarkable. For, owing to the fact that the British Constitution is an unwritten and flexible one, changes, even of a fundamental sort, take place slowly and imperceptibly. The formal law of the Constitution is modified and even superseded by impalpable conventions, the growth of which is hidden for long from the eyes of even skilled observers. Even now, if anyone were to attempt to depict the mode of the governance of Britain merely from official sources, he would draw a picture from which both prime minister and Cabinet would be almost entirely absent.

Nevertheless, the growth of the power and prestige of the prime minister was one of the foremost facts of eighteenth-century British history, and the men who, above all others, contributed to the establishment and development of the great office of premier were Sir Robert Walpole at the beginning of the century and William Pitt, the younger, at the end of the century. When, in 1801, Pitt closed the seventeen unbroken years of his first Ministry, little of effective authority was left to be added to the supremacy which he had asserted and maintained.

The holder of the fully developed, if informal and legally unrecognised, office of prime minister was in 1801, and still is, (1) the leader and chief of the party—or parties in the case of a coalition—with a majority in the House of Commons; (2) the maker of the Ministry, the members of which are selected by himself from among those who accept and support his principles; (3) the framer and controller of the policy of the Government; (4) the dispenser of the patronage

of the Crown, both in State and in Church; (5) the link between the monarch and the Cabinet; and (6) the link between the Cabinet and Parliament. How these various functions developed will become evident in the course of our survey of the century.

### § 5. THE PRECURSORS OF WALPOLE

Sir Robert Walpole was the first person to whom the title "prime minister" can be properly applied. No one before him had that independence of royal control, that authoritative voice in the choice of colleagues, that dominating will in the determination of policy, which are the indispensable marks of the premiership. Nevertheless, long before his day, and, indeed, throughout the whole course of English history, there was a succession of great Ministers who in one or more respects foreshadowed the prime minister and prepared the way for him. In the Anglo-Saxon period, Dunstan, Godwin, and Harold in turn held as Ministers an almost royal sway. Under the Norman and Angevin monarchs, men like Ralph Flambard, Roger of Salisbury, and Thomas Becket were truly *secondarii regum*. Later on, owing to special circumstances, William Marshall, Hubert de Burgh, and Simon de Montfort were more like viceroys than mere Ministers. In the fifteenth century, men like Beaufort, Suffolk, Warwick the Kingmaker, and Morton occupied positions of obvious pre-eminence. Even under the masterful Tudors, Wolsey, Thomas Cromwell, Somerset, Burghley, and Salisbury held (subject to the royal favour) a clear primacy among their peers. The Stuarts, when they came to the English throne, usually had by their side some servant—e.g., Buckingham, Strafford, Clarendon, or Danby—to whom they entrusted the main burden of the government. But none of them was a prime minister in the modern sense of the term. For all of them derived their power from the monarch and not from the Parliament; all of them

held their office at the royal pleasure and not at the will of a party majority in either of the houses of the legislature. Clarendon, it may be remarked in passing, was advised in 1661 to give up his office as Lord Chancellor and confine himself to advising Charles II. in matters of general policy. He declined on the ground that he would too much resemble Mazarin (who died that year), and he repudiated the idea of "being first minister, a title so newly translated out of French into English that it was not enough understood to be liked, and every man would detest it for the burden it was attended with."

After the revolution of 1688, when parliamentary sovereignty superseded royal autocracy, much nearer approaches to authentic prime ministers can be detected. William III., it is true, kept too firm a hold of the reins of affairs to allow Somers, or Montagu, or any other member of the Whig "Junto," to exercise any independent power. Under the weaker and less intelligent rule of Anne, however, Godolphin (particularly 1708-1710) and Harley (1710-1714) secured a hold over the administration and a control of policy that clearly foreshadowed the autonomy of the later premiership. Still more evidently in the opening years of George I.'s reign did the position of Stanhope (1717-1718) and of Sunderland (1718-1720) resemble that of the later prime ministers. But none of these men possessed that parliamentary basis of power, that capacity to appoint and dismiss colleagues, that control of policy, that disposal of patronage, which we have noted as the distinctive marks of the premiership. Sir Robert Walpole, as we have already observed, was the first Minister to whom the title can be properly applied. To the study of his career we will now address ourselves.

## CHAPTER I

*SIR ROBERT WALPOLE*  
(1721—1742)

ROBERT WALPOLE, born in 1676, was the fifth of the nineteen children begotten by the lusty Whig squire of Houghton in Norfolk who died at the age of fifty in the year 1700. Two of Robert's brothers were older than himself; hence, the family not being very rich, he was sent to Eton and Cambridge with a view to a career in the Church. Had his elder brothers lived, he, no doubt, would have become the typical Whig bishop of the Hanoverian period; for he took his theology lightly, and it did not demand from him any renunciation of the world, the flesh, or the devil. His elder brothers, however, died while he was still at college, and in 1698 he found himself heir to the ancestral estates. He therefore left the University and threw himself into rural business and sport, in 1700 marrying the well-favoured and well-dowered grand-daughter of Sir John Shorter, sometime Lord Mayor of London.

On his father's death, two years later, he succeeded, not only to the family property, but also to the family seat in Parliament. In the House of Commons he speedily made a name for himself as a first-rate business man, a powerful debater, and a staunch supporter of Whig policy. He distinguished himself as a member of the Lord High Admiral's Naval Board (1705), and in 1708, on the purging of the Ministry of Tories, he was appointed to succeed his old schoolfellow and life-long enemy, Henry St. John, as Secretary-at-War. He did not hold that important office for many months, however, for in 1710 Anne found herself in a position to dismiss her hated Whig Ministers—Sunderland, Godolphin, Somers, Wharton, and the rest—and to recall her beloved Tories under Harley and St. John. Harley tried to come to terms with the useful Walpole,

but St. John was resolved on his ruin. He was accused of peculation, was committed to the Tower, was expelled from Parliament, and disqualified for re-election for the remainder of the session.

His turn to be top-dog, however, came in 1714 with the death of Anne and the accession of George I. In vain had the Tories, during the four years of their power, tried to convert the Pretender to Protestantism, or to win the confidence of the Protestant Elector of Hanover for Toryism. The succession problem was the rock on which the Government of Harley and St. John made shipwreck: the country would not have a Catholic king, and the new Protestant King, George I., would not have the Tory party, which he deeply distrusted as Jacobite at heart. Henry St. John—who in 1712 had been created Viscount Bolingbroke—did what in him lay to complete the ruin of Toryism, and to confirm the darkest suspicions of the new monarch, when, early in 1715, he fled from England, joined the Pretender, and, as his Secretary of State, helped to organise the Jacobite Rebellion that marked the close of the year.

With George I., then, back came the Whigs to office; and not only to office, but to a power such as neither they nor any other body of Ministers had ever possessed in this country before. It was, indeed, during the reign of George I. that the Cabinet system of government came into effective operation. Queen Anne had regularly attended the meetings of her Ministers, had presided over their deliberations, and had taken a prominent part in determining their policy. So long as this royal superintendence continued, the way towards the development of the Cabinet was blocked. George I., however, who was fifty-four years old at his accession, did not know English, and had no disposition to learn it. Moreover, all his interests were German, and he was entirely indifferent to those problems of British domestic politics which his Ministers discussed at their councils. Hence, he absented himself from their meet-

ings; and the vacant chair which Queen Anne had occupied invited, and, indeed, demanded, a chairman, who, as he became its habitual and permanent possessor, developed into the "prime minister." For seven years, however, the presidency of the Cabinet fluctuated—Stanhope, Sunderland, Townshend, Walpole, appearing to be on a par. By 1721, however, as the outcome of circumstances which we must now note, Walpole had asserted an unquestioned primacy.

In 1714, soon after the arrival of George I. in England, Walpole had received as a reward for his invaluable services to the House of Hanover, and as a compensation for his sufferings at the hands of his enemies during the preceding four years, the lucrative, if not eminent, office of Paymaster of the Forces. Next year, as a consequence of the death of the great financier Montagu (Earl of Halifax) he had been advanced to the important posts of Chancellor of the Exchequer and First Lord of the Treasury. The chief concern of this first Hanoverian Ministry was, of course, to establish the new dynasty firmly on the throne, and to prevent a Stuart restoration. To this end, it (1) broke up the Tory party by the impeachment of its leaders, two of whom—viz., Bolingbroke and Ormond—fled from the country and joined the Pretender; (2) passed the Riot Act, which gave the justices of the peace greater powers for the speedy dispersal of tumultuous mobs; (3) suppressed with vigour and complete success the Jacobite Rebellion of 1715 in Scotland and in England—the worst-managed rebellion recorded in history; (4) took the occasion to place upon the Statute Book the Septennial Act (1716), by means of which the duration of Parliament was extended from three years to seven. The last-named enactment deserves more than a passing mention. For, although it was nominally a war measure, introduced and carried because of the peril which would accrue from the holding of an election (impending under the Triennial Act of 1694) when the embers of an armed insurrection were still smoul-

dering, as a matter of fact its passage was rather due to two deeper and less ephemeral causes, which sufficed to keep it unrepealed and unmodified until, by the Parliament Act of 1911, the duration of Parliament was reduced to five years. These two deeper and less ephemeral causes were, first, the desire of members of Parliament to escape the risk and expense of frequent elections, and, secondly, the desire of the House of Commons as a whole to secure a greater strength and fixity of tenure, with a view to victory in those conflicts with the House of Lords which were so marked a feature of the party politics of the period. So considerably, indeed, did the Septennial Act increase the dignity and power of the House of Commons, helping—together with its control of finance—to make it the predominant partner in the Constitution, that Walpole, first among all great Ministers, chose to remain a commoner all the days of his premiership. Not till he was compelled to resign (February, 1742) did he accept a peerage and retire into oblivion as Earl of Orford.

By the year 1717 the immediate peril of a Jacobite restoration had passed away. The Pretender, both in war and in politics, had shown so high a degree of incompetence, and in religion so extreme an intolerance, as to make his rehabilitation impossible. Hence the anxiety of the Whig Ministers concerning the stability of the Hanoverian dynasty, and concerning their own escape from the penalties of treason at the hands of the outraged Stuarts, became less acute, and they were able to turn their attention to foreign affairs, which were once more drifting towards a general European war. The death of Louis XIV. of France in 1715, the marriage of Philip V. of Spain to Elizabeth Farnese of Parma, the return of Charles XII. of Sweden from his long exile in Turkey, had between them given rise to problems which seemed impossible of solution by peaceful means. In particular, George I.'s Continental dominions, especially Bremen and Verden, which he

had recently purchased from Denmark, were menaced by an attack from Sweden, who claimed them. George was naturally anxious to use his British forces, naval and military, in defence of his German territories. The Whig Ministry was acutely divided upon the question whether he should be allowed to do so or not. On the one hand, the traditional Whig policy, as determined by William III. and pursued by Marlborough, was one of active intervention in European affairs, and the continuance of this traditional policy was warmly advocated by Stanhope and Sunderland. On the other hand, Townshend and Walpole perceived that the most vital of Hanoverian (and therefore Whig) interests in Britain was the maintenance of peace. They therefore steadily set their faces against any participation in any Continental conflicts. This apparent abandonment of Whig for Tory principles not only deeply offended George I., but also alienated many of their own supporters. The result was that in 1717 Townshend was dismissed, that Walpole resigned, and that both were out of office for four years.

The four years (1717-1721) which saw Townshend and Walpole in opposition were for them by no means years of inactivity. On the one hand, they vigorously criticised the ineffective and highly expensive foreign policy of Stanhope and Sunderland, gradually weaning the Whigs from their predilection for war. On the other hand, they led a successful resistance to some of the major domestic proposals of the Ministers. In particular, Walpole, almost unaided, secured the rejection of Stanhope's Peerage Bill (1719), the purpose of which had been to restrict the royal power of creating new peers, by fixing the maximum number of temporal lords at 184. Walpole perceived that this apparent limitation of the royal prerogative was in reality the establishment of the House of Lords in permanent ascendancy over the House of Commons; for in case of conflict between the houses the ultimate and decisive weapon of the Commons is precisely the power to con-

strain the monarch to create peers. It is the weapon which won the Reform Act of 1832, the Parliament Act of 1911, and the Irish Home Rule Act of 1914. Walpole, by pointing out with masterly ability the full implications of the Bill, caused its defeat in the House of Commons, and thereby saved Britain from passing into the hands of a close oligarchy, emancipation from which could have come only by means of civil war and violent revolution.

This triumph of statesmanship and of parliamentary leadership immensely increased his prestige, and nothing was needed but the crisis caused by the bursting of the South Sea Bubble in 1720 to cause the overthrow of the Stanhope-Sunderland faction (which was deeply implicated in financial fraud), and the recall to power of Walpole and Townshend—no longer Townshend and Walpole. In April, 1721, Walpole was appointed First Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer, Townshend and Carteret becoming Secretaries of State.

Walpole was destined to remain prime minister for twenty-one years. His Ministry, though long, was not marked by any striking events. He deliberately refrained, indeed, from doing anything likely to stir up strife or rouse opposition. The country had passed through a century of unprecedented political and religious tumult; a tremendous constitutional revolution had been achieved; and what was needed above everything else in 1721 was tranquillity, amid which sectarian passion might die away, party animosity cool down to friendly rivalry, and the strength of the nation be liberated for healthy and profitable activity in the spheres of commerce and colonisation. Hence, Walpole took as his motto *Quieta non movere*, or, "Let sleeping dogs lie." Thus, in respect of the highly controversial Act of Uniformity, he neither attempted to repeal it, which would have roused the resistance of the Church, nor tried to enforce it, which would have deprived him of the sympathy and support of the

Dissenters. He, most illogically but most prudently, left it on the Statute Book as a dead letter, while he annually passed an Indemnity Act (1727 *et seq.*) exempting Dissenters from its penalties for the ensuing twelve months. Similarly, with respect to the Navigation Acts, which heavily handicapped colonial development: he did not repeal them, for that would have antagonised the commercial magnates at home; he did not enforce them, for that would have injured and irritated the colonists; he simply let them sink into desuetude. No doubt he lacked heroism; unquestionably he was slack and easy-going; most certainly he transmitted to his successors some awkward unsolved problems; but he gave peace to his own generation, and peace was what, above everything, it needed.

He recognised, indeed, the fundamental fact that tumult of any sort, at home or abroad, would play into the hands of the Jacobites, would endanger the stability of the Hanoverian house, and would imperil the Whig ascendancy. Hence, "peace at any price" was the guiding star of his policy. In foreign affairs this led, as we have noted, to a revolutionary departure from the principles and policy of the old Whigs of King William's day; it led to an Anglo-French entente and alliance, to a cordial understanding between George I. and the Regent, and later to an intimate personal understanding between Walpole himself and the great French Minister, Cardinal Fleury. In colonial and commercial matters Walpole anticipated in practice the *laissez-faire* policy advocated so powerfully, half a century later, by Adam Smith in his *Wealth of Nations*. He let mercantilism lapse; he allowed merchants and shippers to seek their own ends in their own ways; he removed hampering duties from both exports and imports, refrained from enforcing exasperating restrictions, fostered and encouraged the development of both home and colonial freedom of trade. One important innovation he suggested in 1733: in order to check smuggling and to prevent serious losses to the revenue,

he proposed to abandon Customs duties on wine and tobacco, in favour of an excise. But the excise scheme excited so fierce and unexpected an antagonism throughout the country that he quietly and promptly withdrew it.

Twice only during the twenty-one years of his prime ministry did Walpole appear to be in serious danger of falling from power. The year 1727, in which George I. died and George II. succeeded, saw both the occasions. The old King, influenced by his German mistress, the Duchess of Kendal, who detested Walpole, seemed disposed to take into his favour the now returned and half-forgiven Bolingbroke, who at the moment was professing ultra-Whig and strong pro-German sentiments. Walpole was certainly much alarmed by the intrigue; but the King's sudden death at Osnabrück removed the peril. The new King, George II., who as Prince of Wales had been at daggers-drawn with his father, was at first extremely disinclined to take over his father's great Minister. He did, indeed, actually call upon his own friend and major-domo, Sir Spencer Compton (afterwards Earl of Wilmington) to form a Government. But Compton showed himself unequal to the task, and the King— influenced by his German wife, Caroline of Anspach, who trusted Walpole— forgot his ancient animosities and restored the old régime. The winning of George II., however, to the side of Walpole was achieved only at the cost to the country of £150,000 a year in extra grants to the royal family.

If we ask what, apart from the colossal subsidy, enabled Walpole to retain his ascendancy for nearly a quarter of a century, the answer is not far to seek. First, he gave the country the sort of government that it desired. He satisfied the King and Queen by his obvious devotion to the Hanoverian cause and by his lavish generosity with the nation's money. He conciliated the landed gentry, who were inclined to Jacobitism, by his tenderness to their interests, by his reduc-

tion of their taxes, by his devotion to country sports, and by his addiction to the flowing bowl; he was in all respects one of themselves. He delighted the commercial and financial classes by his maintenance of peace, by his non-interference with their activities, by his sound monetary policy, by his high regard for the bank and for the national debt. He gratified the Established Church by his orthodoxy, his conformity, his firm refusal to permit any proposal for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts; at the same time he pleased the Dissenters by his connivance at their illegal pieties, and by his annual Indemnity Acts. A second cause of his long-continued ascendancy was his highly efficient party management. He welded the great "revolution families"—Bentincks, Campbells, Cavendishes, Grenvilles, Manners, Pelhams, Russells—into a solid phalanx which was able to withstand all the shocks of the angry Tories and all the sappings of dissentient Whigs. This strongly organised oligarchy he maintained homogeneous and intact, on the one hand, by a stern discipline which visited disobedience by exclusion and ostracism, and, on the other hand, by a lavish and altogether unscrupulous use of national wealth and official patronage. Votes were openly purchased in Parliament; pensions and places were freely distributed as rewards for undeviating support; the owners of pocket boroughs were kept faithful by grants of peerages, decorations, and doles. The corruption of Walpole's administration was notorious and flagrant; the best that can be said concerning it is that it did not in the least shock the conscience of the age, and that it was not so bad as the corruption of Danby's administration which preceded it (1673-1678), or of George III.'s personal rule which succeeded it (1760-1780). A third cause of Walpole's ascendancy is more creditable to the great Minister. He kept his power so long as he did primarily because his policy was so sound and sensible. He established the principle of toleration both in religion and in politics; he fostered the freedom of the

Press; he emancipated the Law Courts from extraneous interference; he vindicated the supremacy of the House of Commons in the Constitution; he developed the Cabinet form of government; he maintained such conditions at home and abroad as resulted in an unprecedented national prosperity, marked by swelling commerce, developing industry, improving agriculture, rising rents, expanding population, growing towns, increasing overseas dominion. Only—on the other side of the picture—do we have to note as a less satisfactory consequence of his rule, an indifference to spiritual religion, a materialism, a grossness, an immorality, that make it necessary to characterise the age of Walpole as one of the most sensual and profane in our annals.

All things come to an end, however, and, desperately as Walpole clung to power and office, in 1742 he had to resign and to go. The defeat of his excise scheme in 1733 unquestionably weakened his position; the death of Queen Caroline in 1737 deprived him of an invaluable adviser and support; the attacks of the "patriots" (a miscellaneous but constantly growing band, consisting of Jacobites, Tories, dissentient Whigs, and "boys," all inspired by the ideas of Walpole's implacable enemy, Bolingbroke) began to undermine his authority in Parliament. Finally, in 1739, the country began to clamour for war with Spain. In vain did Walpole strive for peace, contending that all the matters at issue—treatment of smugglers, restrictions on commerce, and so on—were capable of settlement by negotiation. He was forced to declare war; but, having declared it reluctantly and against his better judgment, he waged it so half-heartedly and apologetically that in 1742 he was driven to resign. He survived his fall only three years, dying in London on May 18, 1745.

## CHAPTER II

*THE EARL OF WILMINGTON  
(1742—1743)*

WALPOLE's immediate successor, the Earl of Wilmington, need not detain us long. He was "a transient and embarrassed phantom" who never had any real authority, and who vanished from the scene after only eighteen months of merely nominal rule. As we have already noted, his family name was Compton. He was a younger son of the third Earl of Northampton, and a nephew of the famous Henry Compton, Bishop of London, who played so prominent a part in the revolution of 1688 and in the coronation of William and Mary in 1689. The date of his birth is uncertain, but he was nearing his seventieth year when he was called upon to occupy Sir Robert Walpole's place as First Lord of the Treasury. He was a man of extremely small ability and of no strength of character; but throughout his life Fortune had been friendly to him. He was a plodding business man, a hard-working drudge, an honest manager of money, a good sitter on committees. In 1707 he had been appointed Treasurer to Queen Anne's incapable husband, Prince George of Denmark, and his success in straightening out this prince's entangled finances had secured for him, some ten years later, a similar post in the household of the Prince of Wales, afterwards George II. He was also for twelve years (1715-1727) Speaker of the House of Commons. When George II. ascended the throne in 1727, the fact that Sir Spencer Compton (K.B. in 1725) was a *persona grata* to both King and Commons seemed to mark him out for the position of prime minister. But he was unable to compose the King's speech, and his proposals for the financing of the royal household were so much less generous than those of Walpole, that he was relegated to oblivion

with a peerage as a solatium. He never really forgave Walpole, however, for baulking him of the great office which had seemed to be in his grasp, and after 1733 he joined the heterogeneous horde of "patriots"—Pulteney, Carteret, Chesterfield, Pitt, and the rest—who, under Bolingbroke's guidance and inspiration, were hounding the great Minister from power.

When Walpole fell in 1742, the King called upon Pulteney, leader of the parliamentary opposition to Walpole, to form a Ministry. But Pulteney, effective as a destroyer, had no constructive ability. The development of his critical faculty as an assailant of Walpole had been such as to leave him devoid of any positive programme or policy. Hence he was unable to accept the King's invitation, and he retired into obscurity and impotence as Earl of Bath. The two strongest candidates for the position of prime minister who then remained were Lord Carteret—a man of brilliant attainments, but doubtful character—and the Duke of Newcastle—a very dull man, with an immense connection and an infinite capacity for intrigue. Carteret was high in the favour of the King, whose interest in Continental politics he shared; but he was disliked and distrusted by the House of Commons. Newcastle, as the organiser of the Whig party and a wholesale borough-monger, had a great hold over the Commons, but was detested by the King. In the circumstances, they put forward the ready Wilmington as their figure-head and go-between: he was acceptable to both Commons and King, and he was politically so complete a nonentity as not to menace either Newcastle's control of patronage or Carteret's command of policy and power.

A real prime minister Wilmington was not: he was merely a titular First Lord of the Treasury. Carteret was the dominant personality in the reconstructed Government. Three things of note he did behind the screen of Wilmington's name. First, he appointed a committee of inquiry into Walpole's Ministry in the

hope of finding evidence which might justify an impeachment: the committee either did not find it, or thought it imprudent to divulge it. Secondly, he secured the passage of a Place Act (1742) depriving certain pensioners of their seats in Parliament, and so diminishing the sources of political corruption. Thirdly, he implicated the country deeply in the War of the Austrian Succession, which had the speedy effect of involving both England and Scotland in a formidable French-aided Jacobite rebellion that all but resulted in the overthrow of the Hanoverian Dynasty (1745). Before, however, this crisis arrived Wilmington had inconspicuously died (July, 1743), and the Ministry had been remodelled.

### CHAPTER III

#### *HENRY PELHAM*

(1743—1754)

ALTHOUGH Walpole had fallen from office in 1742, he had never lost the confidence of the King. When, therefore, Wilmington died, George consulted him respecting a successor, and he unhesitatingly recommended Henry Pelham, younger brother of the Duke of Newcastle, at that time Paymaster-General and leader of the House of Commons. Pelham, accordingly, was made First Lord of the Treasury in Wilmington's room.

The two brothers—Thomas Pelham, Duke of Newcastle, and Henry Pelham, prime minister—who in partnership for the next eleven years ruled Britain, had had remarkable if not distinguished careers. They were the sons (born 1693 and 1695 respectively) of a simple Sussex baronet who, mainly through the natural and normal operations of birth, marriage, and death, had risen to affluence and had acquired a seat in the

House of Lords as Baron Pelham. He had died in 1711, having laid firmly the foundations of his family's importance. Among the connections of the family were persons no less eminent than Townshend and Walpole. The Hanoverian succession in 1714, therefore, brought Thomas and Henry into prominence. They threw themselves heart and soul into the Whig cause, highly commended themselves to the new king by raising a troop of horse in Sussex and helping to suppress the Jacobite Rebellion of 1715, and as a consequence reaped conspicuous rewards. Thomas, Lord Pelham, in particular, was honoured by being created Earl of Clare (1714) and Duke of Newcastle (1715)—titles which had lapsed in 1711 on the death of an uncle of his.

Both the Duke and his brother attached themselves firmly to Sir Robert Walpole, the one supporting him in the House of Lords, the other from 1717 as a member of the House of Commons. The Duke—a man of but small ability and devoid of high principle—used his lofty position and his great wealth to establish a wide and sinister influence in the underworld of politics. Henry Pelham, who was decidedly superior to his elder brother both in talent and in character, devoted himself to a more open and honourable support of Walpole in Parliament and in office. It is said that there was no one in the political arena with whom Walpole was on terms of more affectionate intimacy. So nearly, too, did his ideas and policy accord with those of his master that he was called “a Walpole in miniature.” His appointment as First Lord of the Treasury, therefore, in 1743 marked the virtual resumption of the Walpole régime.

The first thing that Pelham resolved to do when he was fully established in power was, as soon as possible, to revert to Walpole's policy of peace and non-intervention in European quarrels. This determination involved him in serious conflict with Lord Carteret, his able and masterful Secretary of State. What made the

conflict the more formidable, further, was the fact that the King strongly approved of Carteret's active foreign policy: this very year, in fact, he himself with great gusto took nominal command of an army which defeated the French at Dettingen (June, 1743). Pelham brought the struggle to a crisis in 1744 by demanding Carteret's dismissal, offering as an alternative the resignations of himself and his brother. Three vital principles of Cabinet government were at stake: first, the homogeneity of the Ministry; secondly, the authority of the First Lord of the Treasury; thirdly, the independence of the Ministers, jointly and severally, of royal control. The King fought hard to retain the comfortable Carteret; but Carteret had no parliamentary connection, and George soon realised the power of the Pelhams, and of the great Whig magnates who followed their lead, to starve and destroy any alternative Government that he might set up. Hence, with infinite chagrin, he had to let Carteret (who had just succeeded to the earldom of Granville) accept his dismissal.

The shedding of Carteret, however, although it restored tranquillity to the Cabinet, did not immediately enable Pelham to withdraw from the European war. On the contrary, he had, in 1745-1746, to face the very formidable invasion of the Young Pretender, which came within an ace of driving George II. back to Hanover. The grave peril of the time precipitated another Cabinet crisis, and resulted in a further decisive vindication of the growing authority of the prime minister. Wishing to strengthen his Government as much as possible, Pelham demanded a place for William Pitt, who had obtained a powerful hold over both the Parliament and the people of Britain by his magnetic eloquence and by his burning patriotism. To George and Carteret, however, he had made himself intensely obnoxious by his anti-Hanoverian policy and by his scathing criticism of the conduct of the war — he had even dared to ridicule George's personal

exploits at Dettingen! George emphatically refused to admit him to office. The Pelhams consequently resigned (February 10, 1746), and the King called upon Carteret (Granville), with the assistance of Pulteney (Bath), to form an administration. For forty-eight hours they struggled to comply; but they commanded no party, and could get no colleagues. Hence, they had to confess their impotence to the King, and to advise him to recall the Pelhams with William Pitt in their train. Never again did George II. venture to disobey the dictates of the Whig magnates. It was reserved for his successor, who gloried in the name of Briton, to break up and destroy what Disraeli dubbed "the Venetian oligarchy." Not even George III., however, was strong or clever enough to eradicate the Cabinet system which "the Venetian oligarchy" left as a permanent bequest to the British peoples.

Two years after the carrying of Pitt into office the European war was concluded by the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle (October, 1748). It proved, however, to be little more than a truce. For it left unsettled two problems of fundamental importance—viz. (1), the problem whether Austria or Prussia should be dominant in Germany, and (2) the problem whether France or Britain should have command of the sea, with consequent ascendancy in India and America. These two cardinal problems were of such a nature, and of so pressing an urgency, that their solution could not be long postponed.

Scarcely, indeed, was the ink of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle dry when Austria, which had been compelled to cede the rich province of Silesia to Prussia, began to project and carry through the famous "diplomatic revolution," which, in 1756, ranged those ancient enemies the Hapsburgs and the Bourbons, together with the rulers of Russia and Saxony, side by side in a tremendous alliance to disintegrate Prussia and extinguish its abominable monarch, Frederick the Great. Not even the pacific Whigs were prepared to see so

serious a disturbance of the balance of power in Europe. Even, however, before this great issue was brought to the crucial test of the Seven Years' War, the second great issue—viz., the question of French or British ascendancy in India, in America, and on the ocean—had been raised by Dupleix in the Carnatic, and by Duquesne in Canada. Without the consent or cognisance of Pelham, informal war sprang up in India between the rival French and English companies; equally without his consent or cognisance the French and English colonists in the Ohio Valley drifted into hostilities. Thus he was faced by foreign and imperial issues of the first magnitude when—apparently in vigorous health, and only sixty years of age—a sudden chill carried him away (March 6, 1754).

Waldegrave, in his *Memoirs*, has left us a lifelike picture of Henry Pelham: "He had acquired," he says, "the reputation of an able and honest Minister; had a plain, solid understanding, improved by experience in business, as well as by a thorough knowledge of the world; and without being an orator, or having the finest parts, no man in the House of Commons argued with more weight, or was heard with greater attention. He was a frugal steward to the public, averse from Continental extravagance and useless subsidies, preferring a tolerable peace to the most successful war; jealous to maintain his personal credit and authority, but nowise inattentive to the true interest of his country."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE DUKE OF NEWCASTLE—I (1754—1756)

THOMAS PELHAM, Duke of Newcastle, had long been jealous of the superior position occupied by his younger and untitled brother; hence, though he simulated a

decent desolation at Henry's untimely demise, he was really full of satisfaction at the prospect of succeeding to his place and power. And there was at the moment no one to challenge his claim to the succession : he had the Parliament in his pocket and the King under his thumb. The only able man in the Ministry—viz., William Pitt, Paymaster-General, now forty-six years of age, was still obnoxious to the King, still without a following in the venal House of Commons, still strong only in the rising, but as yet impalpable, power of public opinion. Pitt was regarded with so much jealousy and aversion by Newcastle that, in spite of the fact that for eight years he had most loyally served the Pelhams and had brilliantly defended their humdrum policy in the House of Commons, he refused to make him Secretary of State in 1754, and actually dismissed him from his Paymastership in 1755. Pitt, indeed, disgusted and outraged by Newcastle's ingratitude and hostility, had not hesitated, from the Government bench, vigorously to criticise the Government's policies and performances. And they were gravely open to criticism. For Newcastle, although he was an adept at the arts and crafts of the party underworld—at the distribution of secret service money, at the bestowal of places, at the purchase of rotten boroughs, at the procurance of votes, at the portionment of patronage—was helpless and hopeless in the business of administration, in the maintenance of diplomacy, and, above all, in the conduct of war. And by 1756 the long-meditated designs of Austria upon Prussia, and of France on Britain, had precipitated themselves in the tremendous general conflict of the Seven Years' War.

The war had begun most inauspiciously for Britain. In 1755 a British army under Braddock, marching to attack Fort Duquesne on the Ohio River, had been surprised and destroyed by the French and their Red Indian allies. In 1756 itself the island of Minorca, one of the prizes of the War of the Spanish Succession, was captured by the French, in the very face of a

superior British fleet under Admiral Byng. Before the end of the same year came the appalling news of the occupation of Calcutta by Surajah Dowlah and the deaths of 123 English captives in the Black Hole. Popular indignation demanded the destruction of Surajah Dowlah, the execution of Byng, and the removal of the incompetent Newcastle Ministry. And popular indignation got all it asked for.

A new force, indeed, was making itself manifest in the sphere of British politics—the force of public opinion. As yet spasmodic, incalculable, ill-informed, brutal, irrational, it was destined to grow in strength and in volume until it took entire possession of the sovereignty of the State. Pitt was the first to perceive its advent and to make himself the mouthpiece of its saner demands. In the matter of Byng's execution, however, he did not hesitate to oppose the clamour of the insensate and injudicial mob. He carried the House of Commons with him in an appeal for pardon for the unhappy Admiral. George II. was obdurate. "You have taught me," he said to the suppliant statesman, "to look elsewhere than to the Commons for the sense of my subjects." It would appear that by 1756 George had learned the English language, and that he knew something of the reality of British politics.

By that date, too, Newcastle had discovered that possession of a purchasable majority in a corrupt Parliament was not the whole content of politics. He, too, perceived that outside Parliament, and beyond the King, lay a new claimant for authority, a new inspirer of legislation, a new executive will, a new inexorable judge—the sovereign people. He dreaded, with the terror of a mole who hears the dogs at hand, lest the voices which were hounding Byng to death should begin to bark for his blood, too. Hence, in November, 1756, in the hope of being able to crawl away unperceived, he resigned his Lordship of the Treasury, and left the King face to face with Pitt and the people.

## CHAPTER V

*THE DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE*  
(1756—1757)

GRAVE as was the crisis of November, 1756, when Newcastle crawled away, and inevitable as Pitt evidently was, George II. still declined personally to meet the great commoner, and still more firmly refused to recognise him as the head of a Government. After complicated negotiations, carried on largely through the agency of the King's German mistress, the Countess of Yarmouth, a compromise was concluded. The Duke of Devonshire was persuaded, much against his will, to become First Lord of the Treasury and nominal prime minister, while William Pitt, the effective head of the administration, was made Secretary of State, and was allowed to nominate his trusty friends—Temple, Grenville, Legge, etc.—for most of the great executive offices.

William Cavendish, fourth Duke of Devonshire, who thus interposed his patient presence between the irresistible Pitt and the immovable George, was one of the most noble and attractive characters of a rather sordid and repellent age. Born in 1720, the eldest son of the third Duke, he had sat for ten years (1741-1751) as Member of Parliament for Derbyshire; in 1751 he had been called to the House of Lords as Baron Cavendish, and four years later had succeeded to the ancestral dukedom. Newcastle, earlier in the same year (1755), had brought him into the Cabinet, and made him Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland. It was from this post at the end of 1756 he was lured away to mitigate for George II. the severity of the advent of Pitt to power. He accepted the titular position of prime minister only on condition that he should be allowed to resign it if, at the close of the session, he should wish to do so.

Long before the close of the session arrived he was

anxious to be freed from his extremely unpleasant sinecure. Pitt and his two brothers-in-law, Temple and Grenville, were most obnoxious colleagues, overbearing, unreasonable, insolent. The King was querulous and unfriendly, continually asking him to exercise an authority which he did not possess, to do things beyond his capacity, to see people whom he disliked, and to stop projects which he was impotent to control. He felt, in short, all the disadvantages of the possession of prominence and responsibility without knowledge or power. Further, he was helpless in Parliament. The great Whig machine was working subterraneously against him; in the Lords, Newcastle and a solid phalanx of other dukes were steadily hostile; in the Commons, not all the eloquence of Pitt could make headway against the malignant antagonism of the venal majority led by the corrupt and implacable Henry Fox. Hence, early in 1757, Devonshire informed the King that he should hold him to his engagement, and he advised him that it would be necessary to make some arrangement by which the monarch, the machine, and the minister, could be made to work in co-ordination and harmony. The problem of adjustment was one of extraordinary difficulty. After nearly three months of kaleidoscopic negotiations, however, George, Newcastle, and Pitt formed a triple alliance, and Devonshire, with a sigh of relief, accepted the placid office of Lord Chamberlain, and retired from the hurly-burly of active politics. He never returned, and he died seven years later at the early age of forty-four.

Devonshire was nominal prime minister for less than eight months (November, 1756–June, 1757), but during that short period events moved with dramatic rapidity. In Europe the Seven Years' War raged with unprecedented fury, Frederick of Prussia fighting for very existence against the encircling hosts of Russians, Austrians, Saxons, and French. On the high seas, in India, and amid the American valleys, French and British strove for mastery. William Pitt, with clear

insight, superb courage, serene confidence, and indomitable will, set out to organise victory. His policy was to subsidise Frederick of Prussia, to hire German troops for the defence of Hanover, to keep France fully embroiled in the European conflict, and then to employ all the resources of Britain to secure complete command of the sea, and, on the basis of sea-power, to extinguish the French colonies in America and the French influence in India. His three definite measures during Devonshire's short Ministry were, first, the contemptuous dismissal of a large contingent of Hanoverian troops which the chicken-hearted Newcastle had imported for the defence of Britain against an expected French invasion; secondly, the passing of a new Militia Act for the enforcement and definition of the ancient common law obligation of universal military service; and, thirdly, the formulation of a bold, but ultimately brilliantly successful, scheme for the enlisting of Highland regiments for the overseas war. It was thought by many to be dangerous in the extreme to put arms into the hands of half-barbaric fighting clansmen who so recently as 1746 had been Jacobite rebels. But Pitt calculated rightly that the Highlanders were not politicians, but merely lovers of war for its own sake, and that they would fight lustily and loyally for anyone who would pay them well, provide them with enemies, and give them enough to drink.

## CHAPTER VI

*THE DUKE OF NEWCASTLE—II  
(1757—1762)*

THE triple alliance between George II., the Duke of Newcastle, and William Pitt, which had been negotiated with so much difficulty during the spring of 1757,

worked in practice triumphantly well. Pitt did everything: Newcastle gave everything; George bore everything, accepted everything, supported everything. In other words, Pitt, with an autocracy resembling that of a Roman dictator, assumed absolute control of policy, treating the Cabinet as a mere committee appointed to register his decrees and to put his commands into operation; Newcastle, reduced to the low estate of a mere mechanical engineer, was restricted to the task for which he was specially fitted—that is to say, the task of keeping the Whig party together, securing a good working majority for all Pitt's measures, controlling the borough-market, distributing doles, selling honours, oiling the "wheels of the administrative machine: George, for his part, had to reconcile himself to seeing Pitt and hearing Newcastle. In respect of Newcastle he never succeeded in achieving more than a bored tolerance. Towards Pitt, on the other hand, his attitude entirely changed; he forgot the many indignities which he and his beloved Hanover had suffered from Pitt's caustic tongue in earlier days; he came to recognise the greatness of the man, and as the fruits of his policy and his masterly strategy began to display themselves in glory and dominion, he wholly abandoned his antipathy and took him to his heart. Pitt reciprocated the royal condescension with a deference and a devotion that were almost ludicrous in their ceremonious servility.

On the whole, the Newcastle-Pitt coalition was, within its limited sphere of operation, the most triumphantly successful administration that this country has ever known. It saved Frederick of Prussia from destruction at the hands of his Continental enemies; it established the British navy in undisputed command of all the oceans of the world; it entirely expelled the French power from North America; it placed the English East India Company in complete ascendancy in both the Carnatic and Bengal. In other words, it laid firmly and well the foundations of the

British Empire as it exists to-day. The spirit of the country was raised in four short years from the depth of despondency and terror to the height of exultation and confidence. And the change was obviously and emphatically the work of one man, and one man only—viz., William Pitt. Working with a fiery energy that consumed his frail frame, he negotiated treaties, drew up plans of campaign, selected commanders, despatched fleets, ran the whole machinery of Government (which Newcastle kept well lubricated for the purpose). He touched the summit of success just as the reign of George II. closed. The year 1759 saw the great victories of Minden (August 1), Lagos (August 18), Quebec (September 13), and Quiberon Bay (November 20). The following year, 1760, witnessed the French dominion in India extinguished on the field of Wandewash (January 22), and the French dominion in Canada brought to an end by the British capture of Montreal (September 8). But 1760 also saw the death of George II. (October 25), and with the accession of his grandson, George III., the autocracy of Pitt came to an end, and the glory of his administration faded away.

George III. ascended the throne, at the age of twenty-two, with a very definite ideal of kingship, and with a firm determination to emancipate himself from the servitude to which his two predecessors had been subjected. After the death of his father, Frederick, Prince of Wales, in 1751, he had been brought up by his mother, the Princess Augusta of Saxe-Gotha, with the assistance of the Earl of Bute. The textbook of his political education had been Bolingbroke's *Patriot King*, originally written for his father's edification. The lessons it taught were—apart from the ephemeral and now obsolete one of the desirability of restoring Bolingbroke to office—first, the necessity of breaking the power of the oligarchy of great nobles which had dominated the country since the accession of George I.; secondly, the need to abolish the antiquated and now

meaningless distinctions between Whig and Tory, to end the Schism of the nation into parties, and to reunite the whole people under the banner of patriotism: thirdly, and consequently, the importance of sweeping away the Cabinet system which was based on the principle of party, reverting to the good old method of government by monarch and Privy Council; and finally, the urgency of a revival of the royal power, a restoration of the King's personal influence, an abolition of the parvenu premiership with its impudent usurpation of prerogative, a return to the glorious constitution of the days of Elizabeth. Back to Elizabeth had been the burden of all Bolingbroke's later writings, and the part of Elizabeth was the part which George III. determined to play, in spite of the disability of his sex and the limitations of his intellect.

Circumstances in 1760 strongly favoured a return to the personal government of the King. On the one hand, the great Whig party, lethargic after half a century of dominance, was broken up into wrangling factions, and was devoid of either capable leaders or intelligible policy. The official section of the party was held together only by the corrupt arts of the contemptible Newcastle; but, apart from this official section—intensely hostile to it, avid of office and emolument—was a “Bloomsbury gang” headed by the Duke of Bedford, and a Grenville group to which William Pitt had at one time been loosely attached. On the other hand, the Tory party, long disrupted by Jacobitism, was now reunited and prepared to rally round the Hanoverian throne: for the failure of the '45 rebellion had completely removed Jacobitism from the sphere of practical politics. And to the Tory party attached themselves a number of avowed “King's friends,” headed by George's old tutor, now his confidential adviser, the Earl of Bute: they stood aloof from ordinary politics, concentrating their energies on the one supreme issue, the reassertion of the royal authority, the suppression of the independent premiers-

ship, the abolition of the Cabinet system, the termination of the Whig ascendancy.

The advent of the young King soon brought the great and glorious Newcastle-Pitt coalition to an end. The coalition, in fact, was not nearly so strong as it looked: and a very small amount of sapping brought it down. Newcastle was intensely jealous of Pitt, and eagerly welcomed the royal assistance in getting rid of him; the rest of the Cabinet profoundly despised Newcastle, and made no effort to save him when his turn came. Only two days after his accession, George III. admitted Bute to his Privy Council. Early in 1761 Holderness, the colleague of Pitt in the Secretaryship of State, was persuaded to resign, and Bute was pushed into his place. This made him a member of the Cabinet, enabled him to keep the King informed of its most secret consultations, and gave him constant opportunity to impose the royal policy on the distracted Ministers. In October, 1761, he ventured openly to oppose Pitt, who demanded immediate war with Spain; Newcastle sided with him; the rest of the Cabinet, outraged by Pitt's overbearing manner, gave their support; Pitt resigned. This was George's first great triumph. From that date Newcastle, who hitherto had been humoured, found himself the object of the King's machinations. In a thousand subtle ways he was insulted and neglected. Bute, and not he, was the recipient of the King's confidence, and the means of his communications with the Ministers. The patronage which so long he had controlled was assumed by the King himself, and Newcastle's nominations were studiously and, on principle, ignored. For some months Newcastle, inwardly fuming but outwardly humble and meek, withstood the royal persecution; but by May, 1762, not even he could tolerate it any more, and accordingly he resigned. He had been continuously in office, with the brief exception of Devonshire's Ministry, for forty-five years. The King showed his sense of his long services to the Whig party by

depriving him of three lord-lieutenancies, which he had held since George I.'s time.

Newcastle was one of the least estimable of all the long line of British prime ministers. "Ambition, jealousy, and fear," said one of his contemporaries, "were his prevailing passions." In business, we are told, he was "confused, irresolute, continually rambling from the subject, contradicting himself almost every instant." Burke said the best that was to be said of him when he remarked upon "the immense and almost incredible ease with which he was able to despatch such an infinite number of letters." True, the letters were "singularly slipshod and diffuse"; nevertheless, he got them off, writing them all with his own hand. True, also, that when they were written and despatched they were of no earthly use to anyone; nevertheless, he got them off. He was always busy, although he rarely finished any business. His chief asset was his intimate knowledge, gained by protracted experience, of the working of the parliamentary and party machines, and particularly of their subterranean sections. He knew more accurately than anyone else the value of every rotten borough, the price of every doubtful vote, the honours, pensions, and places necessary to procure the support of every dissentient group of magnates. In the politics of the mid-eighteenth century such knowledge was not to be despised.

## CHAPTER VII

### *THE EARL OF BUTE* (1762—1763)

JOHN STUART, third Earl of Bute, the King's friend, stepped naturally and inevitably into the position from which Newcastle had been evicted in May, 1762. His

rise to the rank of prime minister was one of the curious accidents of the age. In 1747, when he was thirty-four years old, he had happened to be at a race meeting attended by Frederick, Prince of Wales. Rain came on and stopped the racing, and the Prince called for a game of cards. No one of adequate rank could be discovered until an equerry remembered that he had seen Lord Bute on the course. The earl was unearthed and presented; he gave the Prince a good game and an agreeable afternoon, as a result of which he was taken to the Prince's heart and home. He was an elegant man, of courtly manners, and, like Sir Willoughby Pattern, "he had a leg." As to his talents and abilities, they were not of a high order. The Prince himself summed him up concisely in the remark that he was "a fine showy man, who would make an excellent ambassador in a court where there was no business."

On the death of Frederick, Prince of Wales, in 1751, Lord Bute became the *major domo* in his widow's household, and the tutor of the youthful George, who was then thirteen years old. Over both the indiscreet Princess and the impressionable boy he speedily acquired an ascendancy that was far from pleasing to either the old King or the Whig aristocracy. Nevertheless, he maintained his dominion unimpaired, and it sufficed to establish him in May, 1762, in Newcastle's place as First Lord of the Treasury. He repudiated the title "prime minister," regarding it as a vile mark of that Whig usurpation of royal prerogative which he was bringing to an end. He avowedly held his post as the King's servant, at the King's pleasure, and subject to the King's direction. He claimed no precedence over his colleagues in the Ministry who held their places, independently of him, on the same terms and tenure as himself.

Such was the politics of the period that his intrusion into Newcastle's place by no means broke up Newcastle's Cabinet. It had always been a coalition

Cabinet, comprising men of very divergent principles and policies. William Pitt himself was essentially a non-party man, intensely hostile to the close Whig oligarchy; and his association with Newcastle in 1757, as dominant partner in a mixed administration, had shaken the fabric of Whig ascendancy to its very foundations. Many of the old followers of both the evicted leaders were content to remain on in office. Pitt's own brother-in-law, George Grenville, a rigid Whig, attached himself enthusiastically to Bute and became his principal Secretary of State. The antiquated Carteret (Earl Granville)—old but not venerable, and now rarely sober—became the Lord President of the Council.

Thus ignominiously came to an end the half-century of the Whig monopoly of government. We have noted in our survey of Walpole's administration that the Whigs as rulers had many merits. During the fifty years of their power they did their best to keep the country at peace, to avoid Continental entanglements (a peculiarly difficult task since the King of England was also Elector of Hanover), to develop commerce, to foster colonisation, to establish religious toleration, to maintain constitutional Government, to safeguard the liberty of the subject. These were benefits of no mean magnitude. But the Whigs had the defects of their qualities, and there can be no question that the kingdom under their rule sank to a condition of moral degradation and religious apathy such as it had never known before. There was, in 1762, urgent need for a political change, a moral regeneration, a social reformation, and a religious revival. Whiggism had lowered and depressed the monarchy; had fostered indifference to spiritual religion; had secularised the Church of England; had unduly favoured money at the expense of land; had lamentably hastened the process then beginning of the transformation of the old rural Britain of happy villages and picturesque market towns into the new industrial Britain of factories and

slums: had shown itself indifferent to sea-power and neglectful of the navy; had become, under the successors of Walpole, narrow and corrupt, selfish and exclusive, hostile to reform, anxious to keep the people, as well as the King, from due influence in the State.

George III. and the Earl of Bute were not, of course, consciously reformers, when they defied the power of the oligarchs, repudiated the Cabinet idea, and established personal government in 1762. They were, indeed, reactionaries of the extremest type, whose motto was the watchword of Bolingbroke: "Back to Elizabeth." But, nevertheless, they were the indispensable precursors of reform: for nothing less than the combined power of the monarch, the reunited Tory party, and rising company of Radicals, could have broken a monopoly so firmly rooted as that of the great Whig magnates at the end of their half-century of undisturbed possession.

Bute, even with the strenuous assistance of the King, was unable—or, at any rate, was not courageous enough—to keep his eminent place for more than eleven months. In this short period he did three things which outraged the now potent (though constitutionally unrepresented) public opinion so grossly, and brought him into an unpopularity so extreme as to imperil his life. First, he continued his very doubtful and certainly most injudicious intimacy with the King's mother; secondly, he made an enormous effort to clear the Whigs, both high and low, from all the services—an effort which caused a prodigious social upheaval, and brought round him a swarm of embittered bankrupts; thirdly, he concluded the glorious Seven Years' War with a hastily concocted peace, the terms of which were regarded as grossly inadequate in view of the money spent and the completeness of the victory gained. Pitt, from his place in the House of Commons, denounced the peace as a scandalous and treasonable betrayal of the interests of the country. Its acceptance was voted by Parliament only after an

expenditure of secret service money on a scale so extensive as would have made Walpole and even Newcastle gasp.

But though Parliament might be bribed into acquiescence, the populace could not be. They clamoured against the obnoxious Minister; they burned him in effigy; if he ventured into the streets they attacked him, or smashed the windows of his coach. He had to surround himself, for mere protection, with a posse of prize-fighters. Finally, he could stand the strain no longer. In April, 1763, he implored and constrained the King to relieve him of his office and allow him to retire to the safe obscurity of his villa at Christchurch. So ended George's first effort to resuscitate Elizabeth and Burleigh.

## CHAPTER VIII

### GEORGE GRENVILLE

(1763—1765)

THE Earl of Bute, before he departed to the secure solitude of the Hampshire sea-coast, took some pains to provide the King with a successor who, he believed, would continue his policy and would remain amenable to his influence. This was George Grenville, younger brother of Richard, Earl Temple of Stowe, and brother-in-law of William Pitt (who in 1754 had married his sister, Hester Grenville).

The Grenvilles were a Buckinghamshire family, ancient, wealthy, respectable, but in no way eminent before the eighteenth century. The rise of the two brothers, Richard and George, to prominence under the Hanoverians was primarily due to the fact that they were nephews of that great magnate of their county, Lord Cobham—a soldier of note under Marlborough, a leader of the Whig oligarchy until Walpole

quarrelled with him, after which he gave his powerful aid to the dissentients who gathered round Pulteney and Carteret. Lord Cobham in his Buckinghamshire home had become the centre of a family circle of Temples, Grenvilles, Lytteltons, Pitts—familiarly known as “the cousinhood”—which, while professing Whig principles, had manifested its activity in persistent antagonism to the official Whig oligarchy and in severe criticism of its principal measures.

George Grenville in 1741, being then twenty-nine years of age, at Lord Cobham's suggestion or command, had entered Parliament as Member for the county of Buckingham. He had done so in order that he might aid his brother and his cousins, who were already there, in the congenial task of assisting in the removal of Walpole from power. A speech which he had made in February, 1742, was regarded by Horace Walpole as materially accelerating his father's (Sir Robert's) fall. Five years later Henry Pelham had persuaded George to accept office. It was, we may remark in passing, Pelham's practice, in striking divergence from that of Walpole, to silence his critics by giving them minor posts in his Ministry, rather than to make them vocal by expelling them and trying to crush them: he aimed at a “broad-bottomed” administration. Hence, he had made Grenville a junior Lord of the Treasury (1747). In 1749 George had married a sister of the Earl of Egremont, a marriage which had brought that powerful nobleman, the Whig son of the old Tory leader, Sir William Wyndham, within the magic circle of the cousinhood. Egremont had shared with Grenville the secretariat in Bute's Ministry.

By 1763 Bute had come to regard Grenville and Egremont as his creatures, all the more so because their adhesion to him had alienated both Pitt and Temple, as well as the official Whigs, from them. He therefore felt confident that if he recommended them to the King, he and the King would be able to use them as puppets for the purposes of their own policy. In this

expectation Bute was deceived. George Grenville, as First Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Lord Egremont, as his principal Secretary of State (till his death in 1763) showed an exasperating independence both of opinion and of action. Grenville revealed himself to be an obstinate Whig, wholly possessed and even obsessed by the doctrine of the supremacy of Parliament. Hence, he speedily quarrelled with his old patron, Bute, and roused the King to the highest degree of indignation by compelling him to write to Bute telling him not to meddle, and to keep away from the Court altogether. Having thus alienated the King and the Tories, Grenville strengthened himself, after Egremont's early death, by making an alliance with, and taking into partnership, that other group of dissentient and plunder-seeking Whigs, the "Bloomsbury Gang," headed by the Duke of Bedford. The King found himself once more under the abominated domination of the Whigs—not the comparatively moderate, reasonably respectable, and properly organised official body which recognised Devonshire, Newcastle, Portland, and Rockingham as its chiefs, but a miscellaneous collection of doctrinaires and place-hunters who were determined, on the one hand, to assert the ascendancy of Parliament over the monarch, and, on the other hand, to use Parliament to further their own interests.

Before many months had elapsed, George III. had come to hate and loath Grenville with the same energy of detestation as had marked George II.'s dislike of his brother, Lord Temple. He developed a passionate desire to get rid of him, and determined to do so as soon as he could find someone to take his place. The Tories, owing to Bute's failure, being for the moment impossible, he had only two feasible alternatives—viz., either Pitt and the independents, or the official Whigs, who, owing to the unwillingness of either Newcastle or Devonshire to re-enter the service of a King who had grossly insulted and gravely injured them both,

now looked upon the young Marquis of Rockingham as their leader.

Of the two, the King infinitely preferred Pitt: he and Pitt at least saw eye to eye on the question of political party, and Pitt was always polite to royalty. With the Whigs the King had nothing in common, and they were frightfully rude. Three separate times did the King implore Pitt to come to his deliverance, but in the circumstances Pitt steadily declined.

Whilst these negotiations were going on, and before the King had made up his mind to dismiss Grenville and Bedford and to send for Rockingham with his organised band of oligarchs, the Ministry had managed to get itself enmeshed in two great constitutional conflicts, each of which had considerable consequences. At home they had become embroiled with the demagogue John Wilkes over the question of the validity of general warrants (1763); abroad they had precipitated a fateful quarrel with the American colonists through the passing of the famous Stamp Act (1765). In respect of neither of these cardinal questions, however, did George III. differ from his Ministers. He was even more anxious than they to crush the impious Wilkes, whether with or without law. He was not a whit less determined than Grenville to assert and maintain the right of the Mother Country to levy taxes on the colonials.

In July, 1765, however, a crisis occurred at Court which brought the Grenville Ministry to an abrupt end. In the spring of the year the King had shown unmistakable symptoms of that mental ailment which, towards the close of his reign, developed into complete imbecility. It became necessary to pass a Regency Bill. Grenville and Bedford, fearing the sinister influence of Bute, were resolved to exclude the King's mother, the Princess of Wales, from the office of Regent. A party in Parliament took up the Princess's cause, and a lot of nasty things were said. In the midst of the tumult George recovered his sanity. He was filled with fury,

both at the exclusion of his mother and at the insults to which she had been subjected in debate. In wrath he sent for Grenville and Bedford, rated them soundly, and dismissed them.

In view of the disasters which flowed from Grenville's administration, particularly in America, Lord Macaulay felt constrained to characterise it as "the worst since the revolution." Yet Grenville himself was honest, laborious, courageous, public-spirited. But he was tactless, unimaginative, clumsy, stupid. He had little hold over Parliament and, as to the King, "I would," said George, "sooner meet Mr. Grenville at the point of my sword than let him into my Cabinet." Hence, in July 1765, rather than put up with him any more, the King was prepared to capitulate to his enemies-in-chief, the official Whigs. He sent for the Marquis of Rockingham.

## CHAPTER IX

### *THE MARQUIS OF ROCKINGHAM—I (1765—1766)*

CHARLES WATSON-WENTWORTH, second Marquis of Rockingham, was a great-grandson of the famous Earl of Strafford of Charles I.'s time. His father, Thomas Watson-Wentworth, Esquire, the owner of extensive estates in Yorkshire, had rendered Walpole such valuable services in both the county and the Commons that he was in rapid succession created a knight, a baron, an earl, and ultimately (1746) a marquis. He was working towards a dukedom when he died (1750). His son Charles, born 1730, the fifth but eldest surviving son of a large family, inherited the paternal devotion to the Whig cause. His rank, his wealth, his high character, marked him out for prominence in the party. True, his abilities were not great, and he was

an execrable speaker; but this merely meant that he was able to associate on terms of equality with the other Whig magnates of his day. The death of the Duke of Devonshire in 1764, the senility of the Duke of Newcastle (who expired, aged seventy-five, in 1768), and the juvenility of the Duke of Portland (born 1738), left Rockingham without competitor for the leadership of the party. He did not want the leadership; he felt himself incapable of fulfilling its functions; he tried to evade it, but he was thrust into it. When he found himself in possession he struggled to do his duty to the best of his limited capacity. His greatest achievement was to recognise the unique genius of Edmund Burke, to appoint Burke his secretary, to secure for him a seat in Parliament, and to place himself and his party under Burke's tuition and guidance.

In 1765, five years of adversity had schooled and disciplined the Whig party, consolidating their ranks, clarifying their policy, confirming their principles. They were now the avowed champions of parliamentary government, party organisation, the Cabinet system, and the effective premiership of their leader. George's invitation to Rockingham, therefore, was an invitation to the machine. George had to abandon the Elizabethan practice of picking here one Minister and there another. He had to accept a ready-made Ministry constructed by other hands than his own. He detested the necessity, and determined that it should form no precedent, but should be a merely temporary expedient. It was, at the moment, the only alternative to the intolerably obnoxious Grenville. Hence, Rockingham came in at the head of the organised dukedom. He did his best to persuade the difficult Pitt to join him, but Pitt, having refused the King's abject supplications thrice, felt himself unable to accept.

From the moment of the installation of the Rockingham Cabinet the King plotted and intrigued against it. At the end of twelve months the royal conspiracy was successful, and one of the wisest, purest, and most

progressive administrations of the eighteenth century was brought to an abrupt and premature termination. Brief, however, though its period of power was, it had time enough to effect a few measures of striking significance and importance. First, it repealed the injudicious Stamp <sup>Act</sup>, thus restoring comparative tranquillity in the American colonies. Secondly, it proclaimed the illegality of general warrants, thus vindicating Wilkes. Thirdly, it denounced the dismissal of civil and military officials on the ground of their political opinions, thus condemning the proscription initiated by Bute. Fourthly, it restricted the grants made to the King's brothers, thus effecting considerable economies in the public expenditure. Every one of these achievements, however, was repellent to the King. As one followed another, he redoubled his endeavours to find an alternative Government. Finally, in July, 1766, he over-persuaded Pitt to yield to his solicitations. There was really no one else with a chance of success. He was willing to grant Pitt anything he liked to ask, provided only he would deliver him from the official Whigs, and would save him from falling again into the hands of the Grenville brotherhood and the Bloomsbury Gang. Pitt's surrender to this temptation was one of the greatest and most inexplicable mistakes of his career.

## CHAPTER X

*THE EARL OF CHATHAM  
(1766—1768)*

THE one thing which William Pitt the elder had in common with George III. was dislike of the Whig oligarchy—to whose inner circle he had never been admitted—and desire to escape from the party system

of government generally. Hence, when he was asked to advise the Crown as to his colleagues, he readily allowed George to fill most of the minor places with the "King's friends," and for the major places he indicated a miscellaneous collection of oddities devoid of any sort of cohesion or coherence. Burke, in a well-known passage, has thus described the result: "Pitt," he said, "made an administration so chequered and speckled; he put together a piece of joinery so crossly indented and whimsically dovetailed; a Cabinet so variously inlaid; such a piece of diversified mosaic; such a tesselated pavement without cement—here a bit of black stone and there a bit of white, patriots and courtiers, King's friends and republicans, Whigs and Tories, treacherous friends and open foes—that it was indeed a very curious show, but utterly unsafe to touch, and unsure to stand on." The Whig Duke of Grafton, who had deserted Rockingham, was made First Lord of the Treasury; the Tory Lord North was appointed Paymaster; the incalculable Earl of Shelburne became a Secretary of State; the unattached and erratic Charles Townshend, a brilliant butterfly, was invested with the incongruous office of Chancellor of the Exchequer. Pitt himself at the time was suffering the tortures of acute gout. He felt quite unable to stand the strain of constant attendance in the Commons. He therefore assumed the sinecure office of Lord Privy Seal, and retired to the House of Lords as Earl of Chatham with a pension of £3,000 a year for three lives. Pitt was no doubt amply justified in taking this step, but he kept his intention to take it a secret for too long a time. If it had been known earlier, he would certainly have been unable to construct a Cabinet at all. As it was, the peerage and the pension struck a mortal blow at his popularity throughout the country; it was felt that he had been bought by George and that he had become a "King's friend." It destroyed his hold over Parliament; he was a House of Commons man, and the Lords were not in the least

impressed by his histrionic oratory. Finally, it undermined his control over his fellow-Ministers, who considered that they had been duped. He soon realised that he had made an appalling and irrevocable mistake. He sank into melancholy and despair. He lost command of himself and behaved with intolerable insolence to all who opposed him. His gout became worse, and the doctors who attended him, in their zeal to get it out of his feet, drove it into his head. He became incapable of attending to business; he could not bear to see even his personal friends: he withdrew to his country house and secluded himself from all contact with the world. The King treated him with the greatest consideration, for he was his only cover from the Whigs. But not even the King could gain access to him or ascertain his opinion on any public question.

In these circumstances the Chatham Ministry—which was never in any intelligible sense a Cabinet—became a mere congeries of disconnected atoms, not held together by any sort of political affinity. Each member of the Government, like a wandering meteor in the infinite inane, went his own way and did what seemed him good. And the things that seemed good to most of the individual Ministers, each in his own eccentric orbit, were precisely those things which to Chatham, if he had been competent, would have seemed execrably bad. All the Ministers must have been well aware of this, for Chatham was not complex in mind, nor had he ever been obscure in phraseology. But they were indifferent to his views. He had never claimed to be a prime minister in the Whig sense of the term, and the things which he had said about Walpole's monopoly of power prevented him for ever from making such a claim. The Elizabethan or "patriotic" theory of government once again prevailed. Each Minister considered himself the direct servant of the King, and, so long as the King approved, all was well. And it was difficult to do

anything really reactionary and unwise of which George III. did not approve.

When Chatham formed his administration he had splendid schemes in his mind for the conciliation of America, the better government of India, the pacification of Ireland, and the conclusion of a triple alliance with Prussia and Russia to check French aggression. If he had had health and capacity to realise his ideas, the whole history of Britain, the Empire, and the world might have been different. During his retirement and eclipse, however, all these great designs were dropped, and in place of them, first, Townshend made a new effort to tax the American colonies by securing the passage of an Import Duties Act (1767), which, for revenue purposes, levied Customs on tea, paper, glass, and various other commodities entering American ports; secondly, Grafton became involved (1768) in a new conflict with the irrepressible John Wilkes, who returned unpardoned and impenitent from exile, and, while still technically an outlaw, got himself elected Member of Parliament for Middlesex. The Imports Duties Act kindled a flame of resistance in America which was quenched only by the granting of complete independence in 1783; the renewed persecution of Wilkes raised in Britain so fierce a resentment that a new Radical party came into existence, pledged to establish the sovereignty of the people, if need were by means of civil war.

In the midst of the tremendous agitations caused by these injudicious acts, Chatham's doctors managed to persuade his gout to return from his head to his feet. He once more reappeared, like a reincarnated fury, in the council chamber and the House of Lords. When he realised what had been done by his colleagues during his absence, he raved with disapproval, raged with indignation, and resigned, in order that he might with the greater propriety and freedom denounce the Ministers and their deeds, and try to counteract the evil results of their errors.

The ghastly consequences of Chatham's experiment in "patriotic" or non-party administration made it clearly evident that, although the Whig system of Cabinet government might have its defects, they were immeasurably less serious than the defects of personal government conducted by such a monarch as George III. through the agency of such Ministers as Grafton and Townshend.

## CHAPTER XI

*THE DUKE OF GRAFTON  
(1768—1770)*

CHATHAM had been so long withdrawn from active participation in government that his formal retirement in 1768 made little change in the administration. The Duke of Grafton was already titular First Lord of the Treasury, and he was now recognised as prime minister. Charles Townshend had died soon after carrying his disastrous Import Duties Act, and Lord North had succeeded him as Chancellor of the Exchequer, pledged to enforce his policy of American taxation. Grafton now strengthened himself in Parliament, though not in the country, by calling to his aid the Bloomsbury Gang.

But though Grafton by his political alliances and parliamentary management secured a stable majority in the House of Commons, and though he and his crew by their reactionary and repressive policy made themselves agreeable to the King, the acts and attitude of the Government raised a storm of antagonism throughout the country which at length made its continuance in office impossible. As with Bute in 1763, so with Grafton in 1770, public opinion decided the issue: the new spirit which Pitt had evoked from the vasty deep displayed its alarming potency.

To begin with, Grafton, a descendant of Charles II., and the inheritor of some of that merry monarch's personal proclivities, flaunted his amours in the face of society in a manner which outraged both the good taste of the polite and the moral sense of the pious—who at this date were being inspired by the magnetic power of John Wesley and George Whitefield. Further, under the incitation of the King, he continued to pursue the obnoxious Wilkes in the battle over the Middlesex election far beyond the limits both of decency and legality. Hence he stirred up against him a public indignation which found vent in the terrific philippics of the *Letters of Junius*, the authorship of which still remains one of the curious unsolved problems of English literary history.\* Next, he persisted in the enforcement of Charles Townshend's unlucky imports duties, in spite of the growing resistance of the colonists, a resistance which involved him in an expenditure of £100,000 in the process of securing payments amounting to £300. His American policy brought into the arena against him the tremendous oratorical artillery of Chatham, who denounced the iniquity of the Government's policy, and of Burke, who exposed its suicidal folly.

In fine, so general, so concentrated, so deadly, so personal was the attack on Grafton in 1770, that he felt it necessary to resign. The King was all the more ready to receive his resignation because, after all, Grafton was nominally a Whig, and because he had discovered in Grafton's Tory Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord North, a Minister after his own heart.

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\* The authorship of the *Letters of Junius* is usually attributed to Sir Philip Francis. The late Professor C. W. Alvord, who, before his untimely death in January, 1928, had devoted much research to the subject, told the present writer that he had come to the conclusion that Alexander Wedderburn was mainly responsible.

## CHAPTER XII

*LORD NORTH*

(1770—1782)

LORD NORTH was a delightful individual. The eldest son (born 1732) of the first Earl of Guilford, he had been brought up in the household of Frederick, Prince of Wales, wherein his father was Lord of the Bed-chamber. Thus he and George III. had played together as boys, and had formed a friendship which endured to middle life. He possessed considerable ability and much industry, which together enabled him to make something of a name for scholarship at Eton and at Oxford. He displayed a quick and ready wit, and developed an excellent facility in debate. But what peculiarly distinguished him was his genuine geniality, his tolerant friendliness, his easy-going bonhomie, his playful humour, his lack of malice, and his irrepressible joviality. He was not a handsome man, but his fat and rubicund countenance was the index to an extremely attractive and benevolent nature. He was happily married, he had a numerous family, and his home life was a model of gaiety and innocent felicity. Few men in Parliament had to face a more ferocious and malignant opposition than he, but he faced it with a smiling equanimity beyond that of Walpole himself. Under the fiercest attacks he had the disconcerting habit of either going to sleep or appearing to go to sleep. He had, however, the defects of his amiable virtues. He was weak and complacent, too much dominated by the King and by his more masterful colleagues, too ready to surrender his better judgment, and to give effect to policies which he believed to be mistaken and even morally wrong. His so-called Ministry, in fact, was but the vehicle of the personal government of George III., and the appalling condition of the country and the Empire in 1780 (when the re-

turn to responsibility began) was the manifestation of what the Elizabethan system of administration meant when it was operated by a half-imbecile monarch and a wholly subservient tool.

The great achievement of George III., effected through the instrumentality of North, was, of course, the disruption of the Empire by the loss of the thirteen American colonies, and the implication of Great Britain in a European war in which she suffered humiliating defeat. So completely, indeed, does this lamentable tragedy dominate the story of these distressful and disgraceful years, that historians are disposed to pass too lightly over a number of good and useful things which North was able quietly and efficiently to accomplish on his own account. Particularly notable among these were: (1) His India Act (1773), which subordinated the administration of the East India Company to the home Government; established a Governor-General and council with authority over all the hitherto separate and distinct presidencies of Bengal, Bombay, and Madras; and instituted a Supreme Court of Justice at Calcutta. (2) The Quebec Act (1774), which gave tranquillity and satisfaction in Canada, still mainly French in population, by securing to the Canadians their own laws and a complete toleration of the Catholic religion; and, further, by so generously defining the boundaries of the colony as to leave Canada in possession of a vast region round the St. Lawrence and the great lakes which Puritan New England aggressively claimed and eagerly desired to get. The Quebec Act kept Canada loyal to Britain during the War of American Independence, but, on the other hand, it undoubtedly accentuated the hostility of the New Englanders to the Mother Country. (3) The Roman Catholic Relief Act, generally known by the name of its chief promoter, Sir George Savile (1778), which permitted what since 1700 had been forbidden—viz., the public celebration of the Mass, and the acquisition of land on the part of Catholics by

other means than inheritance. It was this moderate and liberal act of toleration that precipitated the insensate Gordon riots in 1780.

But these and other legislative measures were merely by-occupations to Lord North and his master. From first to last, through all the twelve years of this Ministry, they were engrossed with the problem of the behaviour and the treatment of the American colonies. When, at the beginning of 1770, North succeeded Grafton as First Lord of the Treasury, the struggle over Townshend's Imports Duties Act was at its height. The Americans refused to pay the duties; they assaulted the Customs officers who tried to levy them; they organised a universal system of smuggling; they burned the Revenue cutters that endeavoured to suppress it. The conflict between insurgent independence and outraged authority came to a climax in the so-called "Boston Massacre" of March, 1770, in which five persons were killed and six wounded. It was clear that the attempt to enforce the Imports Duties Act in face of the organised resistance of the colonists—and especially of the stalwarts of Massachusetts—would have to be abandoned. Yet to abandon it under pressure of violent resistance seemed equivalent to the abdication of legitimate authority. Hence, a compromise was attempted: all the duties were withdrawn except that on tea, and the duty on tea was retained, not in order to raise revenue, but merely in order to assert the principle of the right of the Mother Country to tax the colonies. So little was revenue regarded at this stage of the controversy that, in consideration of a threepenny duty which the colonials were required to pay at their own ports, they were exempted from a shilling duty which from time immemorial they had paid—and paid without demur—at the port of London, whence hitherto their tea had come; that is to say, they were to get their tea cheaper than ever before, and cheaper than people in Britain were getting it. The very cheapening of the tea, however, was re-

garded as a subtle form of bribe, luring those who loved luxury rather than liberty to sell their birthright for a pot of Oriental brew. The temptation, however, to the weaker brethren, and still more to their wives and daughters, was potent. Hence, when in 1773 the East Indiamen entered Boston Harbour laden with the controversial leaf, the stalwarts, disguised as Red Indians, boarded the tea-ships and mingled their contents with the briny deep.

This outrage caused the monarch and his Minister to resolve to abandon efforts at compromise and conciliation and resort to stern repression. In 1774 they passed through a complacent Parliament, and with the approval of a very angry people, the four "Intolerable Acts," which (1) closed the port of Boston, transferring its business to the rival port of Salem; (2) annulled the constitution of the colony of Massachusetts; (3) established martial law under the British General Gage; and (4) transferred the trial of certain cases from the colonial courts to those of England. After this the outbreak of armed conflict was merely a matter of brief time, and, accordingly, at Lexington in April, 1775, the first shots were exchanged.

This is no place to tell, even in outline, the familiar story of the War of American Independence. Suffice it to say that the gross mismanagement of the British Government on the one hand, and the stern resolution of the colonists, coupled with the brilliant generalship of Washington, on the other hand, so gravely shook the prestige of Britain that France (1778), Spain (1779), and Holland (1780) all determined to seize the occasion, and to destroy once for all the British sea-power and Empire. These avowed enemies, moreover, were reinforced by a so-called Armed Neutrality (consisting of Russia, Denmark, and Sweden) which threatened to join the host of Britain's foes unless Britain surrendered her rights of search and modified her methods of blockade (1780).

The year 1780, indeed, marks the nadir of the for-

tunes of Britain. At home it saw the Gordon Riots, with London for a whole week in the hands of a plundering mob; in America it witnessed the all but complete success of the colonists and their French allies; in Europe it beheld Gibraltar invested and brought to the verge of surrender by the Spaniards: in India it watched Hyder Ali of Mysore, in nominal collusion with the French, ravage and occupy the Carnatic; in the North Sea it gazed on the incredible spectacle of Dutch men-of-war and American privateers sailing at large and working their will as though no such thing as a British navy were in existence. Britain had not a friend or a sympathiser in the world. Such was the condition to which ten years of George III.'s personal rule had reduced the country that, twenty years earlier, under Pitt, at the time of George's accession, had enjoyed undisputed supremacy among the nations of the earth.

That the true source of all the trouble was the King himself was recognised by John Dunning, Member of Parliament for Calne—later Lord Ashburton—who carried through the Commons this same year his famous motion: "That the influence of the Crown has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished." The carrying of such a motion through the venal House of Commons, half of whose members were tied creatures of the Court, indicated the intensity of the rage and despair which filled the nation as a whole. Lord North, terrified by the magnitude of the peril abroad and the menace of the resentment at home, implored George to release him from office and let him go home. He told him, too, as plainly as he dared, that he would have to abandon the effort to coerce the colonies, let them have their independence, and then make the best terms possible with his victorious Continental foes. George commanded him, on his oath of allegiance, to remain and do as he was ordered. Hence, he struggled on, against his will and against his conscience, until the final blow of Cornwallis's capitulation

at Yorktown (October, 1781) forced him to insist. He warned the King of the impossibility of continuing the struggle any longer, and of the imperative need for peace, and, when George declined to listen to him, he braved the royal anger and resigned (March, 1782).

Chatham by this time was dead. Always maintaining the cause of the colonists against the coercive policy of the King and his Minister, he had constantly urged conciliation and concession, lest the struggle should lead (as it ultimately did) to the separation of the dominions from the Mother Country. He dramatically and appropriately terminated his great career, on April 7, 1778, protesting in the House of Lords against "the dismemberment of this ancient and most noble monarchy." He was stricken as he struggled to speak, and, having been carried to his home at Hayes, he there passed away on May 11.

If he had been alive and well, he, above all others, would have been the man to deal with the crisis of 1782, as he had dealt with that of exactly a quarter of a century earlier. Since, however, he was gone, when North resigned the King could do nothing but appeal to the Whigs, who had consistently opposed North's policy, to form a Government and conclude a peace. Hence, Rockingham and his entourage came back, Edmund Burke, as before, leading them in and providing them with ideas.

### CHAPTER XIII

#### *THE MARQUIS OF ROCKINGHAM—II (1782, APRIL-JULY)*

THE twelve years of North's humiliation, and in particular the War of American Independence, had once again sharpened and defined the distinction between Whigs and Tories: the Whigs were for concession,

and the Tories for coercion. Long exclusion from office, moreover, had healed the schisms among the Whigs; the corrupt and self-seeking groups had been extinguished or absorbed, and a close party organisation had been re-established. Hence, with Rockingham returned a compact body of Ministers more nearly a Cabinet in the true sense of the term than any body which had ruled since Walpole's day. Charles James Fox and the Earl of Shelburne were the two Secretaries of State—Fox, who had signalised himself above all others in the House of Commons by his passionate denunciation of North's American policy; Shelburne, who professed himself the disciple of Chatham and the exponent of his principles. Edmund Burke, not being a territorial magnate but merely a moral and intellectual genius, was not admitted to the Cabinet, but was made Paymaster of the Forces.

The Rockingham Government had not to waste any time in framing a programme. Twelve years of active opposition had taught its members exactly what they wanted to do. First, they at once opened negotiations for peace with both the American colonists and the French; secondly, they restored to the Irish Parliament the legislative independence which it had lost as a result of the Declaratory Act of 1719 and the Statute of Drogheda of 1494; thirdly, they introduced economical reform—Burke's peculiar hobby—by excluding Government contractors from Parliament, and by depriving Revenue officers of the franchise; fourthly, they drastically revised the Civil List, reducing pensions and suppressing many sinecure offices; fifthly, they reformed the regulations for the colonial service, abolishing life appointments. All this in three months! And they were proceeding to give effect to many other desirable projects when, on July 1, at the early age of fifty-two, the Marquis of Rockingham died.

Personally, Rockingham left no mark upon his generation. Though his character was estimable, his abilities were poor. His main merit lay in the fact that

he recognised the ability of Burke, and did what in him lay to realise Burke's ideas. Thus, he was able to prepare the way for peace in Europe, for the independence of America, for a period of tranquillity and prosperity in Ireland, and for the purification of British politics from the condition of corruption and degradation to which they had been reduced by Newcastle and Henry Fox on the one side, and by George III. and his minions on the other.

## CHAPTER XIV

### *THE EARL OF SHELBURNE*

(1782—1783)

SHORT as had been Rockingham's second Ministry, it had been long enough to allow the sharpest antagonism to display itself between the two Secretaries of State, Fox and Shelburne. According to the curious and arbitrary division that prevailed at that date between the spheres of the two Secretaries, it fell to the lot of Fox to conduct negotiations for peace with France at Paris, and for Shelburne to conduct parallel negotiations with America at Versailles, twelve miles away. As was natural, grave difficulties arose, that led to violent friction and intense animosity.

When Rockingham died Fox hastened to the King and begged him to place the Duke of Portland—a Whig magnate of the highest order, son-in-law of that Duke of Devonshire who had been prime minister in 1756-1757—as figure-head in Rockingham's room, and to leave the Ministry otherwise unchanged. But George had no desire to leave the Ministry otherwise unchanged. He was anxious, above all things, to get Fox out. He loathed and detested Fox: he hated his political principles that tended to radicalism and republicanism; he resented his consistent support of the

American colonists in their conflict with Lord North; he abhorred his loose morals, his passion for gambling, his irreligion, his levity; he regarded him, with some justice, as the corrupter of the Prince of Wales and as the evil influence which alienated that young man from his parents. He, therefore, decisively turned down Fox's suggestion, and indicated his intention of inviting Shelburne to occupy Rockingham's vacant position. Fox emphatically declined to serve under Shelburne; Burke and other Whigs concurred; they resigned, and George accepted their resignations with alacrity and grateful thanks.

The withdrawal of the Whigs, however, placed Shelburne in a difficult position—a position not unlike that occupied by his great master, Chatham, before he came to terms with Newcastle in 1757. He had no party behind him in Parliament, and he had scarcely enough followers to fill up the vacant places in his Cabinet. As to Parliament, his only security lay in the fact that the Tories under North and the Whigs under Fox were so vehemently hostile to one another that they were likely to accept Shelburne as a *tertium quid*. As to the Cabinet, so desperate were his straits that he was constrained to offer the great office of Chancellor of the Exchequer, with the leadership of the Commons, to the youthful William Pitt—second son of Chatham, then aged twenty-three—who had been in Parliament but two years, and had held no preceding office at all.

Apart from the Gilbert Workhouse Act (1782), which authorised the union of parishes for poor law purposes, the one achievement of the Shelburne Ministry was the conclusion of terms of peace, and the recognition of the independence of the American colonies (1783). When, however, the preliminaries of the peace came to be laid before the House of Commons, the amazing spectacle was presented of Fox and North combining to condemn them. Although this unnatural and unprincipled combination, cemented

only by a common antagonism to Shelburne, caused a revolt on the part of some of the more honourable followers of both the contracting parties, nevertheless, the aggregate rout of the Foxite and the Northite hacks so greatly exceeded the number of those who rallied to the defence of the Government that the preliminaries were rejected. The consequence was that Shelburne, even though the King implored him to carry on, felt it necessary to resign (February, 1783).

It is doubtful, indeed, whether, apart from this defeat at the hands of unscrupulous foes, Shelburne could long have maintained his position. He was an able man, a man of great political knowledge, a wise and moderate politician. But he was detached from both the great parties. He had entered public life under the auspices of Bute, he had served with Grenville and with Chatham, he had recently been Secretary of State to Rockingham—and he had shown himself so independent in his opinions and so incalculable in his actions that he had earned the incurable dislike and distrust of all the managers of the machines. He was nicknamed "Malagrida," from a notorious Jesuit conspirator of Portugal; Burke described him as "a Borgia, a Catiline, a serpent with two heads." Even those who joined his Ministry in 1782 and tried to work with him found him, from some obscure cause, intolerable; and even before Fox and North combined to overthrow him, his Cabinet was crumbling away. The Duke of Richmond complained of his autocracy, and absented himself from all the ministerial meetings; Admiral Keppel protested against his policy and resigned; Lord Carlisle followed Keppel's example, alleging Shelburne's desertion of the American loyalists as his excuse; the Duke of Grafton held on a little longer, but finally broke away, on the ground of Shelburne's "want of openness"; Camden gave notice of retirement at the end of three months; General Conway was, with difficulty, persuaded to remain. There is something strange and inexplicable—or, at any rate,

never yet adequately explained—in this general distrust of Shelburne, and the widespread detestation which he evoked. Even William Pitt, who stayed with him to the end—bound to him though he was by ties of ancestral piety and by gratitude for high promotion—when he found himself once more free, made a firm resolve that never in any capacity would he serve with Shelburne again, and he is reported to have said late in life that whatever sins he might have committed as a Minister he had amply expiated them beforehand by the year of Purgatory, which he had passed through under Shelburne. Shortly after his retirement the derelict premier was created Marquis of Lansdowne, but never again was he invited to take any part in the public life of the country.

## CHAPTER XV

*THE DUKE OF PORTLAND  
(1783, APRIL-DECEMBER)*

IF public opinion was amazed at the union of Fox and North against Shelburne, much more astonished was it when it discovered that this union was not a mere momentary combination for a particular and ephemeral purpose, but a firm alliance with the object of capturing office and establishing a coalition Government. And public opinion was more than astonished; it was outraged and scandalised. The eighteenth century, as we have had occasion to observe before, was not a squeamish age—although by this date the Methodist revival and the Evangelical reform of the Church were beginning to elevate the moral standards of the community. But an alliance for the apparent purpose of securing the spoils of office between Fox and North was more than even its easy-going conscience could stand. True, Fox had for four years (1770-1774) been

a minor member of North's Ministry; and true, also, their political rupture in 1774 had not destroyed their personal friendship. Both were genial, amiable, convivial individuals who tended to regard politics as a dramatic performance. Nevertheless, in 1774, the political rupture between them had been so complete, and their subsequent clashes so terrific, that the possibility of their ever coming together again had not occurred to anyone.

North was the typical "King's friend"; Fox, the chief of all the King's enemies. North was the champion of the neo-Elizabethan system of personal government; Fox of the newly developed Cabinet system. North was a disciple of Bolingbroke; Fox of Burke. North had been the main opponent of the claims of the American colonists; Fox, their most vehement vindicator. North had steadily resisted both economic and parliamentary reform; Fox had supported the extreme Radical programme. North had struggled to prevent the publication of parliamentary debates, and had restricted the freedom of the Press; Fox had demanded the widest publicity and the largest liberty. In a word, North, as representing the King, was a complete reactionary; Fox, as representing the spirit of the coming age, was a thorough-going revolutionary. They were, as judged by their actions and utterances, as little compatible with one another as water and fire. Their utterances, moreover, not only expressed their intellectual dissent from one another, but also an intense moral abhorrence. North had emitted strong and damaging truths respecting Fox, although he had generally remained master of himself and had not lost his sense of humour. But Fox had passed beyond the limits of restraint. He has been called a master of language, but he was really its slave. When he was "intoxicated by the exuberance of his own verbosity," he was entirely reckless and irresponsible in his violent invectives. In a series of vehement speeches, extending over nine years, he had denounced North as

a betrayer of his country; had charged him with "public perfidy" and with "unexampled treachery and falsehood"; and had expressed the hope that he and his fellow-Ministers would, "through the indignation and vengeance of an injured and undone people, be brought to expiate their crimes upon the scaffold." In 1778, on the outbreak of war with France, when a strong appeal had been made in Parliament for the union of all parties in face of the country's peril, Fox had indignantly repudiated the possibility of his ever working again with North.

And here, in 1783, they were in close and cordial alliance, preparing jointly to impose a Government upon the King. Fox's action is, perhaps, explicable: he was an able man, an ambitious man, a thoroughly unprincipled man, eager for power by any means and at any cost. North's surrender to Fox's temptation is less easy to account for: it is probably another evidence of that amiable weakness which had made him for ten years the tool of the King. He was now made to believe that most of the country's woes were due to the interference of the King with the actions of his Ministers; he was persuaded that Shelburne would not be strong enough to resist the royal blandishments; and finally he was brought to think that he and Fox together, at the head of the respective phalanxes of Tories and Whigs, could establish an administration so overwhelmingly strong in parliamentary support that it could effectively reduce the royal influence to its proper limits. His coalition with Fox, of course, completely alienated him from George III. (who denounced him as a perfidious traitor, and an execrable deserter); but that consequence of his action he had anticipated and was prepared for.

When Shelburne, in spite of the King's appeals, persisted in handing in his resignation, for five weeks the unhappy and indignant George strove to find some way of escape from the hated coalition. He said that he would rather die than recognise it; he seriously con-

templated abdication and migration to Hanover. He was too pious, however, to commit suicide; and Hanover, which he never visited and where he was regarded as a foreigner, offered on reconsideration no attractions for him. Hence, in April, 1783, he surrendered to his coalesced enemies, and accepted the dictated Ministry. The eminent but negligible Duke of Portland was presented to the King as his First Lord of the Treasury. Fox and North assumed the offices of the two Secretaries of State. North's friend, Lord Stormont, was appointed President of the Council; but no other Tory was admitted. All the rest were Whigs, and Fox, *more vulpino*, ruled the whole roost.

George III. was not an easy man to coerce or circumvent. He had numerous modes of achieving his purposes, and an indomitable obstinacy of will. He was immovably resolved to expel the hateful coalition, in spite of its strength in Parliament; and he had not long to wait. The first important measure brought in by the new Government was Fox's India Bill—on the whole, an admirable measure, and one which would have anticipated by nearly three-quarters of a century the inevitable settlement which followed the mutiny of 1857. Such were the passions of the time, however, that the Bill was not discussed on its merits. It was a mere standard round which the contending factions could rend and tear one another. The wildest statements were made—and by none more wildly than by the youthful Pitt—respecting the possible and probable ulterior consequences of the measure. When the issue came to the vote, of course, the solid phalanxes of the allied hosts easily carried it through the Commons. But when the Bill reached the Lords the scene was changed; for the King himself, emerging from the *empyrean* like a Homeric deity, plunged into the fray. He gave a note to Earl Temple and instructed him to show it to all the peers who set any value on the favour of the court: in the letter he declared, in the imperfect English of which he was a master, that

"whoever voted for the India Bill were not only not his friends, but he (the King) should consider them as his enemies. And if these words were not strong enough, Earl Temple might use whatever words he might deem stronger or more to the purpose." No other or stronger words were necessary. The peers, even the least intellectual of them, understood. They rejected the Bill by a majority of nineteen.

The King delayed no more. He despatched a messenger to Fox and North demanding the surrender of their seals, and commanding them to send them by the messenger, and not to bring them personally, as he refused to see them. The insult was gross, and, according to modern standards, the whole action of the King flagrantly unconstitutional. It was not, however, without justification in the circumstances of the time. The dismissed coalition was a mere oligarchic conspiracy; its hold over Parliament was corrupt, it had no base in either the constituencies or the nation at large. George's violent intervention was only an unconventional prelude, in exceptional conditions, to an appeal to the sovereign people. If *they* had supported Fox and North, and had condemned the action of the monarch, then back Fox and North would have come with dictatorial power.

## CHAPTER XVI

## WILLIAM Pitt

(1783—1801)

THE cause which enabled George III. to act with so much energy in December, 1783, whereas, but eight months before, he had been compelled to surrender so abjectly to the obnoxious, was that he had found an alternative Government. He had persuaded William Pitt to come to his help.

William Pitt was now twenty-four years old, and he had been three years in Parliament. During that period he had made a great name for himself by his knowledge, his sobriety of judgment, his diligent attention to affairs, and his extraordinary skill in debate. He had, moreover, served a year's invaluable apprenticeship in administration as Chancellor of the Exchequer to Shelburne. All the same, his appointment as prime minister came as a surprise to the pundits, and their first tendency was to treat it as a joke. One wit prophesied that Pitt's Ministry would be known as the "mince-pie administration," because it would not survive the festivities of the Christmas holidays. For Pitt had but a negligible following in the House of Commons, and over against him were arrayed the angry hosts of the dispossessed leaders of both the great political parties. Fox and North, it is true, in spite of their wrath, regarded their dismissal with some complacency, because they were confident that they would speedily return to office considerably stronger than before. The one thing they dreaded was a dissolution of the Parliament in which they had so assured a majority, and Pitt showed no disposition to precipitate an appeal to the constituencies.

In January, 1784, when Parliament reassembled after the vacation, the crucial struggle began. By that time Pitt had constructed his Cabinet: it consisted of six peers and—its only representative in the hostile House of Commons—himself. Fox and North, reinforced by Burke and Sheridan, and by a multitude of other men of "light and leading," commenced with gusto the congenial task of demolishing the holiday structure of the audacious boy. The youthful David confronted the coalesced Goliath without hesitation or dismay. He held his own masterfully in debate, and he bore with complete indifference the contemptuous rejection of all his measures. Nay, he ignored even direct votes of censure and incessant calls for his resignation. He waited his time with consummate control of himself

and of the situation, confident for the moment in the support of the King, and for the future in the judgment of the people. For he gauged far better than the pundits of Parliament the intensity of the public indignation at the unprincipled coalition of Fox and North. And even in Parliament itself Fox and North were not having the easy and comfortable time that they had anticipated. They found that their less intelligent and more prejudiced followers, accustomed for many years to regard one another as mortal foes, could not coalesce into cordial allies with the same facility as their amiable and convivial chiefs. North's Tories, in particular, began to break away from his control, and to transfer their allegiance to the marvellous boy. The allied leaders of the opposition noted with alarm that, as division followed division, the numbers of their large majority melted away until by March, 1784, three figures had sunk to two, and two to one. When, finally, only a single vote separated the majority from the minority, Pitt felt that the hour had come in which to advise the King to dissolve the Parliament and appeal to the country to decide authoritatively whether it would be governed by the coalition or by himself.

The issue was not long in doubt. Never had an election been fought with so much fury, or with so striking a manifestation of the popular will. Corrupt as were many of the constituencies, the effort to control them in favour of Fox proved, in face of the national uprising, wholly ineffectual. No less than 160 of his supporters—"Fox's Martyrs" they were dubbed—lost their seats, and Pitt was returned to office, and established in power, at the head of a compact and enthusiastic majority. No prime minister had ever before occupied so strong a position as did Pitt in the spring of 1784. He had behind him the united support of the King, the Lords, the Commons, and the nation. Not Chatham at the height of his fame, not Walpole in the plenitude of his ascendancy, not Marlborough and his Duchess together in the fulness of their power over

Anne, had exercised the supremacy which now passed into the possession of Pitt. It was, indeed, as a contemporary rhymster said :

“ A sight to make surrounding nations stare :  
A kingdom trusted to a schoolboy’s care.”

George III. may have hoped that in entrusting his kingdom to a young man, who for less than four years had been free from the jurisdiction of tutors and governors, he was securing a pliant tool. If so, he was speedily disillusioned. William Pitt had a high conception of his own dignity, and an entirely accurate estimate of his own power. He was the true successor to Walpole both in his determination to rule by the authority of Parliament, to revert to the principle of Cabinet government, to revive in its full potency the office of prime minister, and also in the general nature of his policy. One thing he lacked which Walpole possessed, and that was a compact and disciplined party behind him. But this—like Bolingbroke before him and Disraeli after him—he proceeded to create; and long ere the term of his first Ministry was at an end he was at the head of a new Conservative party, supreme both in Commons and country, a party which looked up to him as its maker and its chief.

Pitt’s first Ministry—the misnamed “ mince-pie administration ”—lasted seventeen years, and just saw the eighteenth century out. With his short second Ministry (1804-1806) and untimely death we are not in this book concerned. Nor, indeed, can we deal in detail with the crowded events of even the first Ministry. Suffice it to say that it was divided sharply into two periods—viz., (1) the period of peace (1783-1793), and (2) the period of war (1793-1801). Pitt, unlike his father, but like Walpole, was pre-eminently a peace Minister. His policy was one of cautious, moderate, but extensive constitutional reform. He effected with masterly thoroughness a complete remodelling of the financial system of the country; he attempted to tackle

the thorny problem of parliamentary reform—the disfranchisement of rotten boroughs, the increase of county representation—but he was not able to overcome the resistance of his interested followers; he supported his friend Wilberforce in his efforts to rouse the conscience of the country against the inhuman slave trade; he concluded a commercial treaty with France (1786) which marked a distinct move in the direction of freedom of trade; he initiated a new foreign policy designed to check the aggressive designs of Catherine the Great of Russia; he remoulded the Government of India by his Act (1784), which established that dual control of Cabinet and Company which lasted till 1858; he secured the passage of a Canada Act (1791), dividing the dominion into two separate provinces, under which the growing dependency was administered until Queen Victoria's day.

The French Revolution of 1789, however, checked Pitt's reforming zeal and increased his caution. He regarded that great upheaval neither with the enthusiastic approval of Fox nor with the tremendous detestation of Burke. Looking at it from an insular point of view, he was at first merely thankful that domestic preoccupation would prevent the Bourbon Government from its chronic interference with British concerns. As, however, the Revolution increased in violence, and as power passed into the hands of aggressive Girondists and sanguinary Jacobins, he became hostile and anxious; but, nevertheless, he hoped that he would be able to keep Great Britain from becoming involved in the conflagration. But in 1792 he began to perceive that aloofness would soon cease to be possible. The French occupation of Belgium and the opening of the Scheldt, in violation of recently concluded treaties; the horrors of the September massacres, which roused humanitarian sentiment in Britain to the highest pitch of denunciation; the impudence of the November decrees, which incited the Jacobins of all nations to follow the French example and overthrow their monar-

chies, and promised aid in the enterprise; finally, in January, 1793, the execution of Louis XVI., which automatically brought to an end diplomatic relations between the two countries—these things led him to the verge of war. The French took the final step by formal declaration on February 1, 1793.

Pitt as a War Minister was not a success. He did not understand the French Revolution, or realise its deep underlying causes; he underestimated the magnitude of the conflict in which he was engaged; he planned trivial and futile expeditions to distant parts of the world, and squandered the strength of Britain on innumerable "side-shows"; he chose the wrong commanders—men such as the King's son, "the famous Duke of York," or his own brother, the incapable Earl of Chatham—and retained them in employment until, as Macaulay remarks, "the English army was the laughing stock of Europe"; he lavished money in such wasteful profusion that all hope of ever paying off the national debt had to be abandoned. Nevertheless, in spite of all his misapprehensions and mistakes, so high was his courage, so serene his optimism, so invincible his determination, that he carried the country through the crisis of the revolutionary war, and enabled it to secure a satisfactory truce in the Peace of Amiens (1802).

During the war period of Pitt's Ministry, however, at home, severe reaction and repression marked the order of the day. Whigs and Tories alike were filled with panic, trembling lest the Jacobins of Britain—incited by such writings as Paine's *Rights of Man* or Godwin's *Political Justice*—should imitate the gory example of the French. Hence, an Alien Act (1793) excluded foreign refugees; a Traitorous Correspondence Act (1793) severely punished communications between the revolutionaries of the two countries; the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act (1794) doomed political prisoners to long periods of incarceration without trial; the Seditious Meetings Act, the Treasonable

Practices Act, and the Anti-Combination Act (all 1799) marked the summit of terror-stricken severity.

Most conspicuous, however, of all the war measures of Pitt was the Act of Union (1801), which brought Irish independence to an end, and fused the two realms of Great Britain and Hibernia into the single United Kingdom (as from January 1, 1801). Throughout the great war the Irish had shown themselves persistently on the side of the French; they had allied themselves with the republicans, and had invited the enemy to use their island as a base for an invasion of Britain: finally, in 1798, when Britain was fighting for her very existence with Bonaparte, the Irish had risen in rebellion and had lit the flame of civil war. The rebellion had soon been crushed, and a French force which landed to assist it heavily defeated. But so serious had been the crisis that Pitt had come to the conclusion that nothing remained for Ireland but either complete separation and open hostility, or full absorption into the British polity. He chose the latter alternative, and accordingly carried the Bill of Union through the two Parliaments concerned—through the British Parliament easily, in virtue of his unquestioned authority; through the Irish Parliament (which was asked to commit suicide) with more difficulty, and by means which in any time but that of critical war would have been regarded as most reprehensible.

One of the inducements which had led the Irish Parliament to acquiesce in its own extinction had been the prospect, confidently held out by Pitt, of a large and generous measure of Catholic emancipation. In holding out this prospect, however, Pitt had reckoned without George. The King, when the matter was laid before him, professed to believe that any concessions to Catholics would involve a violation of his coronation oath. He, therefore, with conscientious immobility, declined to accede to Pitt's demand. Pitt, rather than precipitate a constitutional crisis in the midst of a Continental war, felt it sufficient to recuse. The Irish

however, unimpressed by Pitt's gesture, felt that they had been duped, and considered that the Union had been imposed upon them, partly by force and partly by fraud. Hence, their antagonism to Britain entered upon a new and graver phase.

Thus inauspiciously did Pitt's great Ministry end, and the nineteenth century dawn.

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